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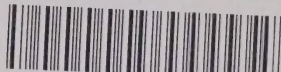
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A GREAT LIE

**"When a man can deceive himself no longer, it is time
to give up living"**

—Tourguéneff



A Great Lie

by

Wilfrid Hugh Chesson

Author of 'Name this Child'

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TIME TABLE

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To
The Memory of ¹/₂ One
Wise in the Great Verity of Pain
And the Greater Verity of Love,
In the Shadow of Whose Passing
This Book was Written.

A Great Lie

CHAPTER I

ON a Thursday afternoon, in a summer gone by, a youth of eighteen, named Edmund Weaverling, stepped out of a little black cottage into a quiet street, which aspired to the town at one end and the hills at the other, but did not reach either. Its disappointment was consoled by a public-house and a sweet-stuff shop, between which it lay, more dull than idle, with all the materials for a siege within its straggling compass; but its commercial eruptions were of no imposing quality, though the missionaries of civilisation had not deserted it. The builders were prophesying

havoc in prettier places by certain scaffoldings and piles of red and ochreous bricks ; and the dwelling of Mr Weaverling the fisherman, Edmund's father, already assumed, with that adjoining it, an anachronistic air.

The downcast looks of Edmund were bent on concealing from him, as far as possible, that he was exposed to the curiosity of the casual wayfarer. The mitigated ugliness of external things, uglier in the line than any given point upon it, was hostile to him ; he felt it, being ugly himself.

But he was facing them this day for the sake of what lay beyond them and across the hills—the sea. The sea would wash away this muddle of figures in his brain, which passed, from being almost a recreation to the studious youth, into a weariness.

Meanwhile, there was the Board School, cheerfully unsymmetrical and airily clean, to go by, and his blood seemed to stand at his eyeballs ; and he earnestly and piously hoped towards God—it was nearly a prayer—that he might

not be noticed by the lads, released from their books, who loitered at the palings.

“Oo-ni!” cried Gotch-one, as he was called, son of a woman who sold hiccuppy teetotal drinks and other delights, within a stone’s throw of Mrs Weaverling, her particular friend.

“Ain’t Ducksfoot in a hurry?” observed Hallaway, another boy, in mock interrogation.

“Quack, quack!” said a third.

“He looks more like a jailbird,” said a fourth.

“Amy’s pet,” said a fifth.

A pebble struck Edmund lightly on the neck, and he turned round and looked with grey-greenish eyes that tried to flash fire and could not upon his tormentors. He tried also to speak, but a gurgle in his throat was all the others heard.

“Corks! ’ow ’e’d like to kill us!” ejaculated Gotch-one; but Edmund had fled.

The boys grimaced at him as they watched his strange running gestures—his legs twisted

like a pollard oak, his elbows stuck out at his sides. The old joke of Edmund in motion did not diminish with time, but it was too hot to keep pace with him.

"Yes, them cripples is spiteful," said Hallaway in answer to Gotch-one.

"Can't see the use of 'em," remarked the other.

Neither could Edmund; and here and now, as he ceased running and strode across a high meadow to the edge of the sea-cliff, his inarticulate hatred of the schoolboys surged over him clamorously, like a great wave that endeavours to beat down and efface an uncouth and jagged rock.

But it could not be so. Nay, because he was wrinkled and pitted and swarthy of face, and rough and warty and stumpy of hand, and knock-kneed and splay-footed, he felt himself more keenly than if he had been a popular member of the crowd. These schoolboys were happy in their own society, in their childish games, in their careless disregard of anything

that they could not put into their pocket or their stomach; but he, Edmund, required a world to himself.

And it was pleasant to call the thick wood to the left of him his impenetrable bed-chamber, and to see on the beach spoils of old battles never to be resumed.

Then he knew that he was weary of the little bedroom at home, with its torn wall-paper, and battered bedstead, and cracked vessels, and the picture of a Germanised saint in a frame.

And the mother, who loved him so well that she did not blame herself for bringing him into human form, faded out of his consciousness: he was all in all to himself.

With a scramble and a jerk down the descent called Baker's Gap, he attained the rocky beach, and in face of the shining sea he stripped himself. The boots that leaked, the coarse red socks that discoloured his feet—the surrender of each shabby garment was a joy to him; but, when he stood free of pretence

before the sun, how pitiable a spectacle he seemed!

He was not fit to be bared utterly in the light, kinder though it was to him mid unprotesting beauty than spiteful mediocrity. The thought that had partly concealed him by those despicable vestments was pitiful, motherly.

“If I were only different!” sighed Edmund.
“The body is everything.”

He had been told to live for his soul, and he laughed a little, reflecting that it was his soul which cried out for a beautiful dwelling-place: his unhappy, discontented, shrinking self was his unhappy, discontented, shrinking soul.

“Oh!” he cried, as he lay among the seaweeds, “I would give everything they pray for down there for the straightness of an arrow, for the strength of a man.”

He felt, somehow, that God had ignored him, that He might have stopped these boys, or turned his footsteps other ways, and did not;

or, rather, he chose to feel this. He had prayed passionately for himself in that little seaside chapel whither his thoughts tended—and himself was still praying. He insisted that his prayer should have had a distinct answer by now. What was the importance of God's actual work for him, compared with that which he besought of God, he did not trouble to consider. His ego drowned memory of twenty other prayers than his in that very chapel. He did not even acknowledge advantage in possessing a finer brain, a wider information, than his superiors in body. "What is the use," he said, "when my tongue is glued to my mouth?" He was consistent in his regret over lost opportunities of saying cruel, clever things.

Sea-ripples that had travelled the world over, and were still fresh and vivid as a sunbeam, ran round him and did not despise him, and the far-away blue of the sky gazed placidly upon him as one under the hospitality of the All-Good, and the semicircular cliffs that held him as in a bowl filled with the sea did not rebuke him, and

such faint wind as there was did not laugh at him. Edmund accepted the tacit permission of Nature, and dozed away. Suddenly, a heavy and sharp stone that had gathered impetus by flight struck him sharply on the forehead. To the moment of the shock of impact, there succeeded a few minutes of breathless and involuntary action, during which the very fibres of his being seemed to loosen and separate from him ; yet he continued to lie still—stiller than ever.

Then, having done with sleep, as it seemed to him, he felt an impending presence that filled him with awe.

“ Edmund,” said a low voice, “ you know me well. Am I like you ? ”

Edmund rose, and confronted the speaker.

Eyes of darkest emerald shone over him, from whose depths the thoughts would never appear, and the dreams might never entirely rise. Under them, the red lips symbolized the seeker and begetter of fleshly pleasures, even while the mouth, indrawn at the corner,

betokened a singular disdain of mankind ; over them, the white brows, crowned with yellow curls dishevelled by the sea-spray, were firm as marble and cold as ice. The azure veins ran up his outstretched arm like floating, creeping weeds seen lustreful beneath the unruffled lucency of the mid-channel waters, and the nails upon the delicate tapering hands were like pink shells lying fresh and wet on the beach.

Yet Edmund, dwarfed beneath him, was less ill seen, here and now, than before the world of other men ; and the thought crept into his heart, and lingered there, that this being, sparkling yet with salt-drops (of eternity, may be) of which now one reluctantly faded or fell, and now another, was here by right of a common meaning in their lives.

And still the stranger's question remained unanswered : "Am I like you?"

"No," said Edmund slowly ; "you are not."

"Let us see," said the stranger; "it may be that you err."

"Impossible!" cried Edmund.

"Softly," replied the stranger. "Whom would you wish to be like?"

"Like you."

"To look at?"

"To look at."

"To *be*?"

Edmund made no answer to this question. He merely said: "You have not come to taunt me, I know."

"No," said the stranger, "I have not. Only Wry-Face taunts."

"You have come to give?"

"Perhaps."

Just then three people passed the beach whereon they conversed, but paid no heed to them.

"After you with the catapult," said a voice from the cliff.

"Wait till they pass, can't you?" said another.

Edmund distressfully sought for a retreat.

"Never mind," said the stranger; "they cannot see you."

"But I am in front of them."

"Mere man never saw or heard such an one as you," said the stranger, and Edmund shuddered slightly.

"Where do you come from?" demanded Edmund.

"There is no sense in that question," replied the stranger. "I have no constituency. I represent myself."

"Then what is that?" asked Edmund.

"I should change somewhat ere the words were out of my mouth. I can now, as ever, only say what I was at some chosen moment. Don't stare. I am not singular in that. Now as to yourself, what were you doing last Wednesday afternoon?"

Edmund recalled that he had made a distribution down the Martello Terrace of a tract entitled, "What shall I do to be saved?" which involved the collection of a tract entitled "A brand plucked from the burning."

"I was changing tracts," he said.

"From house to house?"

"Yes."

"Ah! that wanted pluck, did it not?"

Edmund recalled the fact that a door had been slammed in his face, and that the Martello Atheist—a source of fearful pride to his kinsmen—had dubbed him "a young swine."

"That was soul triumphing over surface," observed the stranger. "Your soul grew under the insult. To-day you are not so plucky: surface triumphs over soul. And I really believe it is I who am to blame."

"And who were you, last Wednesday?" sneered Edmund.

The stranger frowned. "I was not changing tracts," he said. "I was changing hearts; some would say breaking them. I used to like the kind that are worn on the sleeve best. You can buy them. The deep ones are troublesome."

"What were you five minutes ago?" said Edmund, lost in thought.

“The spirit of satire.”

“You *did* come to taunt me, then?”

“By no means. I was in a mood of sacrifice, or of expiation, or of irony, or of compassion: it matters not. I may stand before you with sinful Memory raining frogs and toads from my lips, and you will still applaud ‘the glory that was Greece.’ Yes, if I sang—the great peacock test—it would still be the same. . . . Come, own that you continue to envy my good looks.”

“I do,” reiterated Edmund, though feebly.

“Then wish for them,” said the stranger.

Edmund wished as deeply as he knew how to, over and over again in his heart; but when he looked at his hands and his feet, there was no change that he could see. And, all the while, the stranger gazed sardonically at him with eyes whose depths receded from his depths, taking a message with them. The sea had retreated, and they stood drily, save for the fine-crushed pebbles that remembered their lesson. Something of lustre had

departed from the stranger—perhaps the waning sun drew it from him; but white as porphyry kissed into life, he was still fairer than honest sinners hope to be.

“Your wish is not strong enough,” he said in a thrilling voice with tears in it, mingled with subtle laughter; “consider what you have been: thin and ill and ugly—pitiable, but unloved. Past the river are asphodels white as snow. Your hope has been that the white hand of love may pluck you there. But I tell you that on English meads are other asphodels—not so white, but more fortunate. Theirs is not the clammy comfort of the immortal shades: they are worn on human bosoms; and if it be true that they fade and die, it is because their eternity is compressed into finite hours. The final thrill of joy is the suspicion of pain. Taste it, wish it—you who have never been a man.”

Edmund wished again, but still there was no change that he could see.

“You are too timid,” said the stranger

huskily, for his voice had lost in tone, and he shivered slightly, and colour had fled from his face. "You are too timid. You must wish passionately for yourself. You must wish against other wishes—wishes that would make princes of other men. You must wish against them that insulted you, the idle that sneered at you, the well-off who preached their contentment at you, the sensitive-selfish who shunned you, the philosophical-selfish who ignored you."

He stopped. Edmund did not ask him to go on ; but he wished strenuously that his enemies might be put to confusion.

And when he looked again, it seemed as though he had returned after long absence from one known as an ideal, and now unknown as an unveiled reality ; for he was now level with the stranger's head, and upon it there was no crown of gold, but only hair like unto his. But the stranger's eyes were not less penetrating, and Edmund felt fear of them for the first time since meeting their gaze.

He could see the change in himself quite

distinctly. He was vigorous in an uncouth way : he could have quaffed ale, sung songs, or roughly embraced a woman who had seen the world by a minute process of being seen by it in the darkness as well as the light. And then, stranger still, he felt a new language steal into his head to explain these animal impulses, nay, to render the deeds wrought under them tellable and attractive. *One must realise one's self.*

Yet he was envious of those fine symmetries which still distinguished the stranger.

"It is accomplishing," he said ; "nevertheless . . ."

"All will be accomplished," said the stranger. "You must go on wishing. Wish through all and against all, till your wish brings fruit as well as flower. Wish, despite the evangelist who prayed for you last Sunday, despite the folk at home who love you."

"It is impossible," said Edmund.

The stranger's face was lit momentarily by a smile. Then he stretched forth his hand

and touched Edmund's wrist. "Who gave you the bruise that I see there?" he asked.

Thereat the flush of shame darkened Edmund's face, and his pity for himself was as intense as though he were somebody else. His father had beaten him the day before, without considering his almost adult age. His own father had been misled by his stunted height, just like those schoolboys who would never regard him as a man. He hated those schoolboys: yet they might be excused. They had resented his ugliness as an impertinence, and they were blatantly irreligious among themselves. Why, then, should he not hate his father, who had made sore one of the few sound parts of the body he had misbegotten; and on religious grounds, too! Surely his father had done him the great wrong of beating religion out of him. "It flew like dust out of a carpet," thought Edmund, with sinister indifference to his own profanity.

"Well?" said the stranger.

"It is counted hard," said Edmund bitterly, "to wish against one's father."

"It is hard," said the stranger; "but your poor little wish can do no harm. Though it break through other human wishes, it is but a spent wave at the last. What is a life of your wishing in comparison with the eternity of God's? But against this wish of yours He does not wish; and I make way for it. That is to say," he proceeded, in tones of mockery rather than malice, "I lay aside, for the time being, my favourite Greek philosophy, and make a pretence — so! — of giving you space and opportunity for movement. Come, come; don't be sceptical. Return to childhood. To enter even the little Playground of Sense you must be born again. Wish boldly then, and wish well!"

His speech made Edmund feel giddily free. In other words, his religion was nowhere to be found. He wished for the fourth time, therefore, with greater ease than before;

and when he again inspected his body something of clownishness had fallen from him; his eyes were clearer, and he knew that he understood as well as loved beautiful things. But the stranger had grown shorter than he was, and Edmund thought he seemed deformed. Still, his hands remained delicate and Edmund's continued to be coarse, and unduly hollow of palm.

"You have not done wishing," said the stranger. "Hasten: twilight has fallen. My bed in hell is ready. You must wish for yourself, despite all, despite her—your fate—and me."

Edmund shrank, momentarily, with terror of himself. It was not hard to neglect the God in Christ, but it was dangerous to lose trace of the humanity in himself.

"Despite her . . . and you; you have been kind."

"For me, you see how I have changed, or at least the *illusion* of me (to humour Parmenides, that foolish fellow)" said the stranger, half

sadly, half scornfully. "Come," he added, "do you love her well enough to wish to see her happy with another man, her—found, or to find—whom you shall desire above all besides, if she could not be so happy with you? Do you love her so well?"

"No," said Edmund.

"Then wish!" cried the stranger.

Edmund wished, and knew he stood beautiful as a sea-god through the dusk of evening. He felt the stream of new life like perfect wine in his veins, and all the suppleness and firmness, and trueness of line and curve that he had longed for were his. And beneath him was a dwarf, a poor, vile thing whose eyes alone redeemed it. Did it live, or was it a phantasmal symbol of his past? He felt inclined to kill it. He was strong enough.

But he was too glorious for such deeds. His feet were fleet as quicksilver; his breath was the air made languorous; his thoughts were music—they had neither beginning nor end.

He had no past, and . . . ah! the thing had vanished. What a horrible hole that was in its forehead!

Twelve hours before, and miles beyond the visual limit of his questioning eyes, the *Hardcastle* had gone down with all hands on board.

CHAPTER II

Now Edmund felt very uneasy, for he stood here naked and destitute, as though he had landed on an unfamiliar planet. He had, indeed, strayed past the common round, and changed beyond recognition.

Fair English youths had returned from the East bearded and bronzed ; fleshless bones had clothed themselves during one sea voyage between two continents : such things were current gossip. But no ear would listen to the tale of a man made newly, between the sunset and the moonrise.

Obviously, lies were required of him ; and it irritated him to reflect on the fact, which implied a certain unsoundness of intellect in making use of such a word as "lies," and a

deplorable want of culture in a world which exacted a history of the beautiful, and could not be relied on to support it, from sheer love and fear of its rarity.

It was, of course, impossible to wear the garments that he had cast off: it was impossible to think of soiling this splendid new body with such reminiscent rags.

He stepped across the shingle to the water's edge, among the rocks.

Suddenly he heard his father crying afar off, "Eddie, Eddie, Eddie!"

Edmund would have fled, or, again, he would have sprung forward crying "Father!" but he was interrupted by a feeling of strange isolation, of newness. This man was not his father now. Nay, he felt angry with him as a sinner who had caused the sinless to bring forth after his kind. It was all very well to get converted after having done your mischief.

Intellectually, as well as in body, Edmund had changed. He was looking at things, not

living in them, as he had done. Everything that remained to be done or said would be done or said with new gestures and new words. His head was full of repartees for occasions that would never arise, and instantly ready for those that should. His body was full of rhythms for operatic scenes that the world might never evolve, but it moved appropriately to the living hour. Lying was, indeed, a fine art: it was stagecraft. It stood next to the attitude of pure contemplation, for which it was the substitute. An old prejudice lingered stupidly, inviting a buffet, but it should go in peace: its naïveté redeemed it. His new body made him generous: a lie so splendid laughed at blame. People should crave the very petals of that lie.

“Sir,” he said to the calling man, “I saw hands go up in the air. I tried to save him. Was he your boy? I am very sorry.”

“These be his clothes,” said Mr Weaverling.

“It was but an hour ago,” proceeded

Edmund. "I am a good swimmer. Had it been possible to save him I would have done it, but there must have been a hole in the beach."

"Ay, ay, sir. I was always warnin' him."

"I would have told people of this before, but no one passed, and all that could be done I did. I have been wading and wading, but it is no use."

Heaven was now filmed by brooding clouds, and Mr Weaverling did not mark the dryness of Edmund. He only said: "God bless you, sir, and thank God, my lad was a good lad!"

"And his name was . . . ?"

"Edmund Weaverling, sir."

"Edmund is my name." After a pause he added: "Someone has stolen my clothes!"

"Where, if I may be so bold, do you stop, sir?" said Mr Weaverling.

"Nowhere," replied Edmund. "I am as strange on earth as your son is strange in heaven."

“Well, sir; you cannot stop here. I will get you some things.”

In the fishmarket, where the harbour interrupted the confused succession of rocks, was the little zinc building in which the Weaverlings worshipped God. Half consisted of the chapel, half of a coffee-bar. It was thither that Mr Weaverling repaired for clothing.

Edmund remained, shivering, and, in his forlornness, he sang, almost mechanically, a few words of a hymn; and he was awed by the sweetness of his own voice. He was awed just as he had been when he had prayed more earnestly than usual, and he had known that the light had burned from within and shone from without, and was ashamed of an hour to which he would bring so few as worthy. Therefore, his utterance saddened him as it drifted over the waste of sand and shingle, where lay the ungathered weedy harvest of the sea's tillage.

Then came a moment of divine exaltation :

"I belong to these things. I am part of Nature. I have forgotten how to be ugly."

He lay, dreamily, on piles of bladder-wrack, absolutely alone; and, in this hour of pure self-consciousness, careless whether or not he returned to the loud and incongruous world.

Presently the fisherman returned with some rough garments.

"Put these on, sir," he said, "they're better than naught."

Thereat, as though the gurgle and splash and lisp of the sea had stung him with an idea, he ran into it, and waded neck-deep.

Edmund, while occupied in preparing himself for eyes unused to living statuary, gazed at his father with remorse mingled with amazement.

When, for a moment, the waves showed blank where the seeker had fallen in his quest, he ran down to them in a passion of fear, and then, as his father reappeared, this gave place to the irritation of a liar betrayed by his

affections, and he cried out: "It's no use looking."

"Ay, *you* can say that," was the reply.

Edmund was silent, but after a few minutes more of fruitless search, his father landed, feeling feverish and ill in his dripping clothes, and keeping his teeth firmly set to prevent them from chattering.

"It beats me," said the fisherman slowly, waving his hand at the sea.

"So does the earth at the last," said Edmund. "I am sorry, by the way," he continued abruptly, "to trouble you on my account, but I must tell you that I have no money and no friends in these parts."

"You're welcome to bed and board with me, so long as you've need," said the fisherman.

"Thank you so much," said Edmund. "You see my money was in my pocket, and the thief has that with the clothes."

They walked fast and firmly, the fisherman with the nervous haste of one struck with icy

cold, Edmund with an effervescence of sheer health which suggested that he could fly if he chose.

As they scaled the winding staircase of the cliff, the fisherman inquired: "Where, if I may be so bold, do you come from, sir?"

"In putting that question, you are bolder than I," said Edmund. "I am as alien here as a meteor blown out of the sky."

"I suppose you grew up," remarked the fisherman weariedly.

"*Flew* up were better," replied Edmund. "It was all so sudden. It only took eighteen years to make ME. I burst like a chicken out of my shell—a particularly ugly shell, if I may speak as an amateur," he added fiercely. "I have not seen many people. I lived mainly on a desert island."

"I never had no learnin' myself," said the fisherman meditatively, wondering whether he was talking to a confirmed liar or a speaker of parables.

"Neither had I," vouchsafed Edmund, "or my present acquisition would not have seemed so sudden."

"Why," thought the fisherman, "does this fellow talk this rot to me when my heart is breaking?"

"Why," thought Edmund in a fury, "can't he read my face and see me in it? But, no, he would have given his eyes for a sight of the carcass that misrepresented me. Good God, for eighteen years, he has never seen *me*—only *that*!"

Nigh the fisherman's cottage were loitering a few small boys—persecutors in the old days. One of them was bending over the parapet of a stream that was uncertain whether to pose as a brook or a sewer. Viewing it in the former capacity, the urchin was trying to fish in it.

"That's the kind of boy, I imagine," said Edmund, "who cries 'humpback!' if he sees one stooping, or throws a stone at a cripple, or makes mouths at an ugly face."

"Ah, it's a boy's way," sighed the fisherman. "My Teddy now—"

"Was one of these?"

"No, one of them cripples."

"There is no distinction," said Edmund. "The little sot there, sniffing in the sewer, and thinking he's loafing like a man of the world, is the father of the other sort—sot and sewer combined."

The fisherman gave him a look in which there was more sternness than wonderment. As for Edmund, he took a fearful joy in opening old floodgates and setting impatient torrents free. He reflected that for eighteen years he had not dared to speak out to his father; but times had changed at length, thank God! There was falsetto in that grateful exclamation, but, *n'importe*, times had changed. A new grace was established, and that he was not able to assume it quite as naturally as the tapering spire of gold, the lily-cup, hardly mattered. For the nonce, it was a pleasure to revert to the buried past,

to defend the dead self as some loving twin-brother thereto.

His courage sank a little at the cottage door of his home.

“Go in first,” he said to the fisherman, “and tell what you must. Fetch me in afterwards, if your wife can bear it.”

Mr Weaverling obeyed him, and waiting outside, Edmund heard a woman’s wail: “O it was crool—too crool! It ain’t true. It can’t be.”

Anon the door was opened, and, stooping as hitherto he had only seen his father do, Edmund advanced.

“You was kind to my Teddy, sir,” said his mother.

“I wanted to be,” said Edmund.

“Have some tea, sir. There be some feather buns. Do you like them, sir?”

“Of all things.”

Edmund knew his mother so well that he had no hesitation in talking of the subject of her grief.

"He was a cripple, I heard," he said.
"May you not thank God?"

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," quoted the fisherman.

"Do not let us talk nonsense about God," said Edmund. "God gives life and beauty, and the means of sustaining both. But for God's sake, don't fasten on Him the vile and misshapen forms under which life is tortured till death is a comforter—an angel of light. If this child of yours ever suffered in his body, if he was ever cowed and shrinking, if men were unkind to him, if he thanked God for death, I swear to you that he never thanked God for life."

"We never swear in this house," said the fisherman.

"I beg your pardon," said Edmund. "I come from France, where there are five and twenty blasphemies suitable for people who don't swear."

"France ain't a desert island," remarked the fisherman austere.

“You remember too well,” said Edmund. He sat staring at the fire and smiling at his own lies, his plate still full of feather bun, and his replenished cup waiting for him.

“Dick!” he said wheedlingly, addressing the cat, who was black and sleek and solidly made, and Mrs Weaverling wondered how he knew its name.

Edmund would have stroked the top of this amiable animal’s head, but Dick would have none of him, and retreated. Edmund grew sombre ; it was only yesterday that he had laid his cheek against Dick’s fur—Dick who never laughed at him or flattered those who did.

Soon Mrs Gotch entered, her form of billowy fatness leaving no room even for the fine shades.

“Well, how’s Teddy?” she inquired breathlessly.

“Dead,” said the fisherman.

Edmund had to tell the fiction which he

had invented all over again to the mother and Mrs Gotch.

“And did he say anything?”

“Yes, he said, ‘My God, you’re very good!’”

“That’s like Ted,” said the fisherman. “May we all die as fit! Well, he’s in the Golden Streets, that’s sure. ‘In My Father’s house are many mansions.’”

“Some are used to cottages,” remarked Edmund; “but these Golden Streets, do you think they are finer than the sea—the ‘pavement of amber’—the land of meadow and wood and spring, where there are no streets?”

“The sea shall become ‘as the blood of a dead man’; the ‘third part of trees,’ shall be burnt up, and ‘all green grass,’” said the fisherman.

“A change for the worse, I apprehend,” said Edmund, “though decidedly effective. There’s a transpontine touch about the blood which should please the children.”

No one understood what he meant, but the fisherman's intuitive dislike of him deepened.

A look passed between him and Mrs Weaverling which seemed to indicate: "The Jebusite is in the camp of the Lord."

"You read the Book, I hope," said the fisherman.

"It is read to me very often," said Edmund; "that is one of my privileges. There was One who healed the lame and palsied, and made the blind to see. It sounds harder to do that than to turn fair water into blood."

"You believe in God, I presume," said the fisherman.

"Are not the days of the week called after Him, in His character of sun and moon, Tiu, Oden, Thor, Freya, and Saturn respectively?" said Edmund.

A dark suspicious look mantled the fisherman's face. Then he took his Bible and began to read of the Resurrection.

"It is all true, every bit of it," inter-

rupted Edmund, "and the sea hides nothing—nothing."

"Let us pray," said the fisherman, and he and his wife knelt on the floor, but Edmund continued sitting.

What was it his father was saying?

"O God, You are very mighty, and our hearts go out to You, and we love You so, come life, come death. And You have taken away our son, Edmund Weaverling, and we thank You, though we're cut up. He was our only one. Forgive us, Lord, for missing him. We know he's all right now, but we do miss him, and we want You to show us that he *is* all right, some day. We thank You that our friend tells us that he died trusting. The Blood of the Lamb is enough, O Lord! It cleanseth: it is like the sea——"

"Like the sea," echoed Edmund.

"Bless my dear wife," continued the fisherman, "and bless our friend, and let us go on trusting. The peace of God be with us all. Amen."

"Amen," said Edmund.

Edmund slept in his old bed that night. No dreams marred his deep tranquillity, for he was drenched in the spirit of satire.]

"The Lord forgive me, but I could have knocked him down," said the fisherman in the adjoining room.

"The Lord made him too beautiful for that," said his wife.

CHAPTER III

It was with feelings of repugnance that Edmund donned on Friday the makeshift of the previous evening for lack of other apparel. His tender skin revolted against its roughness.

Five o'clock of a sweet and silent morning was striking with singular distinctness in the drowsy ears of the town, and ere the hours were told, Edmund was in the kitchen.

The dead ash in the wide grate with its gaping chimney, the unconsidered crumbs of feather-bun on the table, lay powerless to depress him under the blaze of the risen sun. But, more than all, his miraculous youth shone in his hair and his eyes, creating a prospect of pleasure and ease wherever he

gazed. The fire had burned out in the grate, the meal was a crumby remnant on the table, but his youth might never fade and die, his feast was inexhaustible—it was the world and all that therein is.

It was out of the sheer exuberance of his joy, rather than any kindness, that he seized the poker, and raked out the ashes, intending to make a fire.

He was interrupted by his mother: "This work is not for the likes of you," she said.

"You are mistaken, Mrs Weaverling," he replied, "unless you mean that I ought to be picking oakum."

"You seem so grand," she said.

"How?" he asked; then, suddenly, he shrank back a pace or two with an ejaculation of dismay.

"Lor! it won't hurt you! It's only a blackjack," cried Mrs Weaverling. "My Teddy wur never afraid of 'em. He made 'em little kennels out of paper."

It appeared that he used to exclaim,

"Mummer, here's a ickle beetle!" when he was but six.

Edmund stopped the flood of reminiscence by inquiring after Mr Weaverling.

"He's right poorly, I'm thinking," said the woman. "I never had a wink of sleep last night, listening to his coughing. He'll have to lie abed, I reckon."

"I am very sorry. Is he awake?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can I see him?"

"He's in bed, sir."

"I must see him."

His tone was peremptory, and he was conscious that by merely looking at his mother he compelled her obedience.

He followed her to the bedroom where the fisherman lay.

"I am so sorry to see you look so ill," he said, "you must on no account go out to-day."

"I must, sir," replied the fisherman, gruffly.

"You cannot," replied Edmund. "Listen, I will attend to your boat in the morning, taking people out for rowing, and you shall stop in bed."

"Can't be done, sir."

"Nonsense!" said Edmund, "it must."

"It's my affair, sir."

"Give me three minutes," said Edmund. "You suspect me. My tongue is a needle. The other end of the needle is in my heart—that is why. But look in my face and tell me if there is any evil there."

The fisherman looked at him with keen, small eyes:

"You are not vain?" he asked, with a vague sneer.

"Vanity implies thinking. I never think," said Edmund.

"Time to begin," said the fisherman.

"I will, when instinct fails me," said Edmund lightly. "But to the point. Is evil ugly? Then I tell you that I revolt against all ugliness."

"Absalom was fair," remarked the fisherman.

"But his sin, my friend, was designed to punish his father. The economy of God makes sin indispensable as salt. And we are superstitious about spilling salt."

With a sharp look, half-angry and half-weary, the fisherman put one foot out of his bed.

"Stop a moment," said Edmund. "Remember you are ill."

"What then?" said the fisherman.

"If anything happened to you, what would become of your wife? To go out would be to tempt Providence. I do not know the theology of that temptation, but, as you know, the tempter gets the worst of it. Now, I insist on doing work for you this day. I have eaten your bread and prayed your prayers. I will not wrong you. You shall not say 'No'."

The fisherman was, in truth, too ill to disobey. His head ached; his breath was painful.

"So be it," he murmured.

"But I must borrow your clothes," said Edmund, and then and there he proceeded to put them on.

Watching him drowsily, the fisherman was astonished by the girth of his limbs and their surpassing whiteness.

"You weren't never on a desert island," he said; "you never grewed out of nothing."

"Unlike Enoch," said Edmund vaguely, "I started by walking with God. With regard to desert islands, I was eighteen years on one, inhabited mainly by a vicious kind of intelligent monkey, not quite prehensile, but nearly so. We met some coming home last night. Good-bye."

"What lingo is this?" thought the fisherman in disgust; but Edmund was already in the street.

He knew that the business with the pleasure-seekers would not begin till eleven, but the glories of the morning were more than the uses. The sun dropping living gold into a

hollow emerald, the wan, bright air splashing his face with the foam of the sea, struck answering flashes from his dancing eyes, and his cheeks awoke into colour. The beauty of him lay as open and unabashed by his grandeur as the poppies dreaming aside of the sentinel lines of firs that climbed the cliff and darkened the dainty pathways that crept about it.

All the desires of his nature seemed to move rhythmically, the gladness of love and the gladness of strength. His thought moved absolutely apart from the antitheses or opposites of the things in which he rejoiced. There were no thirsty people, no shivering people, and none sick or in prison, in the world which he created out for his own eyes.

And now he wanted people to recreate their world by seeing him.

To his disappointment, they did not at present pay much attention to him. Still, he noticed that elderly spinsters selected him from among the boatmen, though others were

more fluent canvassers than he. He took a curious pleasure in figuring for these angular creatures, with their bird-like contours, a something for which they craved indefinitely and with no tragic passion as his had been.

His first two fares were sprightly types of this class of woman. Seated together reposefully, they looked at him as the oars dipped and redipped, scattering the delicate feathery spray. The delight of mere rowing was enough for him, the delight of finding that at his second birth he had by nature that which others acquired by art.

But their look at him as an adorable savage showed, though it were but dully, the starved feminine desire in themselves, unconfessed even to each other: He is human, he is a man, he is beautiful—strong; let us look at him, they would seem to say.

Or they would add: He is ignorant; we are above him; we are at home in hotels and genteel boarding-houses.

More than that, they were initiates in the

delicate unrealities of the metropolis; they were accustomed to speak half-truths in well-bred English and prettily-inaccurate French, or Italian, perhaps—or even German, if a little music were thrown in to counteract the words. As for music, Mendelssohn *ohne worte* was just the thing.

Edmund listened with a strange feeling of understanding when the elder of his fares said, as she dipped half a hand in the gleaming water: "It is quite like that little Gondellied in F sharp minor, Charlotte."

"Do you know, I was about to say the same thing," was the reply, and both ladies wondered whether the boatman did not think they were very clever to have such ideas.

Meanwhile, they continued to look at Edmund, who was silent, asking himself whether his youth would bring forth nothing better than the furtive regard of the elderly and timid.

When he had disembarked his freight, he had an interval in which he observed the

chariness of chaperons. They seemed afraid of him on behalf of their young charges. He was not a catch ; he was a snare. The thought tickled him till he laughed, to the consternation of the public. There was enough vulgarity in it to justify his using the *vox populi*. Hence his phrase : youth is birdlime for the oof-bird. He read it in the face of every chaperon, every mother, who chose a weather-beaten mariner to sail with in preference to him.

Perhaps, though, it was stupid to be so clever in detecting motives. The beach was so crowded, so various in its alleged attractions. The town-band playing music, so meaningless, that even words could not have gibbered more unintelligibly ; their unofficial rivals, the sham negroes, or S. Vitus Dancers of the Fair, ambitiously warbling,—

“I would I were a kipper in the foam,”
to the tinkling of an irresponsible banjo, the chattering of bones, and the jingling of tambourines ; the diplomatic boatman collecting

signatures against a project to prevent his tribe from worrying the visitors; the children digging holes with the enjoyment which unmakes the vanity of futile labour; the nurses reading, sewing, gossiping — the thread of common meaning in all this, was so slight that it seemed a pedantry to trace it.

And if criticism were ill bestowed on this scene, what had it to do with the fashionable promenade that was high above it? There, all the graceful languors of pretty womanhood, the eager idleness of beautiful girlhood, contrasted with the lack-lustre laziness of middle-aged valetudinarians and young men "of the period," might well astonish the critic, till he should lie on his back, or lean on his elbow, and forsake his tablets.

But Edmund, seeking with misgiving his relationship with the world of his past, hunted down remorselessly the elements that would survive in himself and them, though the seven seas should unite in an attempt to cleanse them.

A love of gross money, of empty spaces, or spaces filled with trumpery matter.

Oblivion of that which money was made to sustain and comfort, of that which space was intended to shelter—the real youth, the lasting beauty.

Youth and beauty had come upon him suddenly. He was twice blessed. He was not such a fool as to say he had paid in money.

He had paid in wishing through and against the million gross things that never had lived and never could live.

Against his father for one ; and his father was ill !

Edmund quickened his pace homeward, and as he proceeded, a woman, dressed in mourning black, looked after him with astonishment and made a step in pursuit.

“ Surely that must be Edmund,” she mused ; but she faltered in her thought, for she had testimony that her Edmund, the beautiful, the accomplished, the despondent, the erratic, was dead.

Far behind her was a monstrous hotel, the aggressive patron of three "superb views," whose ambitions were divided between bankruptcy and limited liability. In a balcony of this edifice Miss Charlotte sat conversing with a friend. As thus :—

"We saw a curiously handsome boatman to-day."

"It is often the case, dear," said the friend (as though there were statistics on the subject); "it is the fresh air that does it."

"He was quite Protean," said Miss Charlotte.

"He had only one face, I hope," said the friend.

"One at a time, of course," said Miss Charlotte, tartly.

Subsequently, when Miss Charlotte's characteristics were under review, the friend remarked that she was shallow.

"Why?" asked the gossips.

"Because she never sees anything beautiful without thinking of the heathen."

As for Edmund, the thought that his father was ill, and that he had wished against him, did not cease because his step was fast. It shone around him in colour-pictures. The blaze of wild mustard cried shame upon it in scorn; the healing leaves of the common mallow gave no credence to his unchildlikeness. Nature had but two voices: "I cannot forgive," or "I cannot believe." From the mass of poplars, and the elder-trees whose flower rested on them like foam tossed up from their waves of living green, at the foot of the returning sea, to the cliff's summit whereon the virgin convulvi clasped trusting arms about the neck of a giant, there were no other voices than these. The dark firs crept up and up into the light in spite of him, and the shining poppies marched abreast of them in the same aspiration. The marigolds, wandering children of the garden, nodded their careless oblivion of him. Up in the sky, eastwards, an almost human cloud lay down as a god, to sleep a respite for him. But doom was coming, coming . . .

It was refreshing to turn from Nature's high disdain to men and women passing to and fro, satisfied candidates for one another's notice. To them, at least, he was no lie; to them, at least, he was harmless. For them, at least, he was born again.

He struck savagely across a field. Boys were playing cricket there. It amused him vastly to stand and watch. The bowler bowled wides, and the batsmen gained their runs almost solely by byes. Whenever a straight ball came, the fieldsman cried "Out!" and the bowler shouted it.

Once, however, this had seemed high pastime to him, worthier of celebration than the so-called decisive battles of the world.

Gotch-one and Hallaway were in. He remembered how he had truckled to them in the old days, exclaiming: "Well done, sir," if one of them skied a ball.

Now, Hallaway had returned a ball to the bowler, who missed it. It passed to Edmund's feet, and he picked it up.

"Let me bowl an over," he said.

They sullenly assented.

Then there was a call of joy. Hallaway's middle stump reeled, and the bails hit the wicket-keeper on the hands.

"You have one end of the hundred anyhow," said Edmund derisively. He had made that jest a year ago, and had waited till now for the courage to fire it off.

He let Hallaway's successor make one run in order that he might bowl Gotch-one with his third ball. That being done, he clean bowled two more, and left the field to muttered denunciation of his interference, and open admiration of his skill.

Afterwards, by aid of enormous threats, Hallaway continued his innings on the ground that "it wasn't fair."

Edmund finished his walk, rejoicing.

He gave the fisherman twenty shillings.

"Praise the Lord!" said the latter. "Ten of these be yours. A pound is more'n twice my takings."

He tried to reduce the benefit, but the fisherman compelled him to take it.

Coming into the kitchen again, he was disagreeably surprised to find Old Brewster there. Old Brewster was a Christian devotee subject to spiritual exaltations. His head had a way of moving constantly sideways, as though it was receiving an invisible buffet.

Edmund shook hands with him. Leaning forward in his chair, with that horrifying spasm upon him—so horrifying that even children did not insult him—the old man drew his hand back, and wiped it on the almost brittle surface of his discoloured corduroys.

“Hot hands, they say, is cold 'earts,” he mumbled. “Well, well, how's the boy?”

This remark was addressed to Mrs Weaverling.

“Why, you know, Mr Brewster,” she began.

“I don't know,” he returned, doggedly,

“and I tell ’ee, *wait*. Good-night, young gentleman,” he said to Edmund, “good-night, I shall see you pretty often, I expect, till *he* comes back.”

Rising with difficulty, the old man tottered to the door, and, still shaking his head to the right side, ascended the street.

Somewhat upset, Edmund went to bed, but his rest was spoiled by tiresome dreaming.

CHAPTER IV

ON Saturday, Edmund was aware of the eruption of lurid news which had temporarily displaced even the Cricket Championship from the posters. But he was bored by this shipwreck with its multitudinous gestures and cries, so vehement and futile, so stagy, now that the mad paddle-wheel had ceased its revolution. True, hundreds had gone down, but he had risen again! True, thousands were wringing their hands, but he flashed back the cumulative irony of the ages. He was alive, even he, Edmund. If all the graces of all these dead people were taken as the preparatory sketches of a masterpiece, was he not infinitely more than they, being the completed picture? "They talk of children," he cried out derisively. "Children forsooth!

The Gotches and the Hallaways are the children I know." He would not read the papers that told of other children that would have melted him, even as they melted hearts of lead, and relaxed an iron despair. He would not read of the men standing to their fate like heroes, with no vain cry of Westminster Abbey on their lips, but conscious of their captain's error, and loyal in the making light of it.

"I can't moan over people I never saw," he said pettishly. "I could wish that the five survivors had been picked men—not apes. They say a poet went down. Well, that sounds appropriate: he would never have gone down with the public in any other way. But he is said to have cried *au revoir!* as he leaped overboard. That sounds ominous."

The fisherman was more interested in the catastrophe than he, although the body of his son had not testified to his death, to rid his soul of an all-displacing hope.

Twice had the teathy rocks under Baker's Gap, appeared and reappeared under weed and water, indefinitely hungry; the stealthy crabs, immerging into and emerging from the saturated sand, were declared innocent by their ghastly thinness, and the sea, dispassionate in its immensity, forbade no scrutiny of its marginal shallows.

Edmund brought him a report to that effect at about eight in the morning. The fisherman was understood to declaim huskily, from the depths of the cotton-wool into which he had been sewn, against the vanity of looking for a dead thing.

"It is written," he said, "that the sea shall give up her dead."

"That will be a bad day for the crustaceans," remarked Edmund, who escaped censure through not being understood.

Indeed, the fisherman could not make up his mind as to whether his guest was a new-fangled specimen of evangelist or a scoffer, temporarily suffered to illustrate the folly of his kind.

After breakfast, Edmund incidentally struck tears out of Gotch-one. "That's how Moses got it out of the rock," he said.

The apparent cause of this outbreak was slight—a little lie that circumstance offered to him. Indeed he seemed just, righteously angry. The real cause impelled him neither to crack jokes nor blaspheme, but to blush hotly to the roots of his hair with remembrance of what he had once endured, and silently to pledge himself to cynicism and revenge.

He was agreeably diverted from such unchristian feelings, in the course of a special visit to the promenade on the heights, to see people in the act of reading a hurried obituary notice of himself in the *Scout*.

He did not feel severe to-day. The ladies, fluttering the demy-folio pages of that paper, seemed a prettily-petty crown to the ambitious handiwork of Nature, even if they could not be said to take rank with the convolvuli.

Below—it was troublesome to guess how

many feet—little boys dived from a break-water into the sea.

The ladies looked down quite helplessly on the glassy surface which hid the divers as effectually as though they were never to reappear, snorting, and out of breath.

“After the affair of that little cripple, it is quite unpleasant to see this sort of thing,” said one.

“Will he *never* come up?” thought another.

Their mild speculative alarm, or, in the case of one or two, their deep but unprotesting anguish, was a fine commentary on the limits of philanthropy.

These Toms, Dicks and Harrys, unlimited, exerting themselves with such apparent danger, were protected from the interference of the timid for several reasons. First, because they were Toms, Dicks, and Harrys, unlimited, and had no obvious connection with any other firm. Secondly, because the safety of the commonplace is confirmed by observa-

tion. Thirdly, because the way to the divers was long and steep. Fourthly, because no one else was going to their assistance.

Such was the way that poor human nature was exposed on the Saturday afternoon following the disappearance of a crippled boy.

No one going through these arguments while the children bathed beneath her, but was shadowed by their spirit of selfishness and time-serving. In each one who feared, the cynic, raised up to combat the coward, imposed his false personality, for longer than his time of service, upon his creator.

Gazing sharply down into the arena, Edmund found himself addressed by Miss Charlotte.

"Is it safe for those boys, do you think?" she inquired.

He turned round flashingly, "Shall I tell you straight, Miss?" he said.

"Better straight than crooked," she answered.

"I wanted to tell you," he said, "never to be afraid about others."

"Why?"

"Because it makes others afraid of you."

"Really! that is clever," she said. "Why on earth don't his clothes fit better?" she thought. "That jersey is positively bursting. Clearly he's a gentleman—a journalist in search of copy, perhaps. It must be part of his masquerade to dress like that."

"I am sorry," resumed Edmund, "that I gave you a moral reason. It would be so satisfactory to many people; but the true reason why you shouldn't be afraid for others is that it takes such a lot out of you. It cries out for an ocean of tears, and what can you give?—next to nothing. Fear demands remedial action, but it nearly always produces—well, youths like that Weaverling that was drowned."

"How horrid of you!"

"Not at all. Take an ugly child—the parents do not love it; it were happier un-

born. 'Kill it then,' says Reason: 'a life for a life,' says Fear. Very well, the child is brought up. Later on he has his say, perhaps. And what a posse of unendurable ideals are thrown overboard when that comes to pass! But the sea that receives them is so clean, and makes them into sea-weed, I have been given to understand. And yet, you are afraid of it!"

He lifted his cap and strode away whistling.

Smiling, like one who has exhibited to advantage a remarkable curiosity, Miss Charlotte resumed her reading. Firmly convinced that he was masquerading, her interest in him was lively.

Edmund was not interested in her; he was thinking of Amy Grainger, the musical methodist, with the soft brown hair, the kind eyes, the pretty pink cheeks, the red, little, mobile mouth.

There was no fear now of boys calling him "Amy's pet"; it would no longer be within the capacity of the Sunday-school teacher to

stoop down and touch with her cool hand the place where the stone had stricken him—as once.

Yet, in those intimate offices of kindness, how unattainable she had been. And now in his Antinous-like glory he saw her conquered in advance, and the vision thrilled him, nor was it surprising that he mistook his cruel self-complacency for tenderness.

Little recollections of her stirred him as a dream leading heavenward. Her head slightly bent over some hymn-books, one delicate ear, like a sea-shell, caressed by an idle wisp of hair, was flower-like in the rosy lamp-light of yesterday, now as ever, though the warm glow of a declining sun abased all pettier things before the sea.

It seemed so easy to be loyal to an old desire that had been at once his abounding joy to possess, and his despair not to be able to confess—so easy, so delightful.

But the word “loyal” had never occurred to him before. It was intellectual, moral, to

say "be loyal"; it had been passionate, spiritual, to say "adore."

"How is Mr Weaverling?" he inquired when he reached home.

"About the same, thank you, sir," said his mother.

"This congestion of the lungs has been a serious business," he remarked; adding, in a mere frolic of mendacity, "it was rather lucky that I turned up."

"If you'd been a son you couldn't ha' done more," she said.

"I daren't have done less for such a mother," he replied, and she looked in his face with a painful feeling of remembering something seen or heard long ago.

After tea, Mrs Gotch appeared, and Mrs Weaverling effusively thanked her, and left the house.

Edmund listened to her footsteps. "It is odd; she is not going down town," he said.

"No, she's bought the dinner," said the other. "She do look worried, don't she?"

Quite mopin' like. She's restless; that's what she is."

"Ah!"

"Yes. She's fairly upset, and it was 'ard to lose the little feller. She'd kept 'im all these years."

"Yet he was ugly — he was a cripple," said Edmund.

"Bless you, she never thought about it in that way—she was so proud of him. Says she to me, 'Mrs Gotch, 'e's cleverer nor any of us.'"

"How so?"

"He read and read; he was allus studyin'. You see he couldn't do much work, and the boys plagued him."

"Ah, the tenth plague would have been a blessing in *his* time," said Edmund.

Mrs Gotch was puzzled, but the melody of her own voice was as good as an explanation to her.

"Boys will be boys," she said.

"They will be devils till it is whipped out

of them," retorted Edmund. He then proceeded to draw a faithful portrait of Gotch-one. "Here is a boy that I saw to-day amusing himself with pushing some smaller boy, who evidently admired him, into the gutter. Every time his victim returned from the gutter, he pushed him in again. He had bristly black hair, small, black, meaningless (unless I say cruel and greedy) eyes, and a wolf's jaw."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Mrs Gotch.

"But I *do* say," retorted Edmund. "I clumped his head, so I ought to know; and he wore a sort of waspy yellow suit, a red tie, and a little dirty stand-up collar. He'd made his handkerchief into a tollywhack, and his boots had hobnails that made a horrid scratching noise on the pavement. Odious little beast!"

Mrs Gotch recognised the clothes, and was wrathful. Only the righteous traditions of twelve generations of Methodists kept her anger down.

"I dare say there are worse," she said.

"Then we are indeed chastised by scorpions," returned Edmund.

"Anyhow," she said, "poor little Teddy wasn't hurt by no boys. He was drowned. A cripple, too! Why, thank God, I am well and strong, and yet I hain't seen the sea these ten years. Yes, ten years come next August."

"It seems a pity to spoil such a record by crossing Jordan," sneered Edmund.

Shortly after this, his mother returned. Though it had not been raining, her boots were soaking, and she took them off and gloomily watched them steam before the fire.

CHAPTER V

MRS WEAVERLING was glad to hear Edmund remark that he was going to chapel that Sunday. He heard her telling the sick fisherman of his approaching exploit, and the cheery answer: "Then he's on the Lord's side, after all."

"It a'most seems the Lord 'ad sent him," said his mother.

"O praise the Lord, He thinks of everything for everybody."

Their implied misunderstanding of him made him feel uncomfortable.

Did they lie unwittingly, and contribute to a hideous scheme of irony in a manner

which left him guilty of the stain and the horror; or did they not lie, but subserve their Lord in the vindication of that Sun of Righteousness under which all false things are but "as cloudlets that flee"?

Was he really beautiful? he asked himself as he left the cottage and strode between some railed backgardens and a field to Transpontine Street, which lies under the viaduct.

From an ornamental attic on his right, a servant struck him with an inquisitive eye, or a man in shirtsleeves halted momentarily in pulling up some weeds, and across his vision a train broke the Sabbath over his head with a defiant whistle and an impetuous swish.

It was certainly in no dream that he saw these solidities and stolidities; he gave no motion to them as they gazed at him with alien eyes or simply ignored his presence. Had they been an ingenious lie he would have deciphered them, but, instead of that,

he saw absolutely no meaning in these vegetables and men, these houses that stood still or ran on wheels.

"The vegetables are looking very human to-day," he remarked; and, when he reached Transpontine Street, he found his opinion confirmed by the boy called Hallaway's mentioning to Gotch-one, on their way to chapel, that "he ought to be under a glass case."

Edmund said "Good morning" to them.

"Good morning," they replied.

"You must be sorry at not being able to walk with young Edmund Weaverling."

Both boys became sulky.

"You were so fond of him, I heard," quoth Edmund, "so kind. Pretty though you unquestionably are, you never thought him too ugly to play with, did you?"

"I didn't play with him much," said Hallaway.

"Nor I," said Gotch-one.

"I like to think that you made him so

happy that he died of joy," said Edmund, frowning blackly.

They were at the public-house at the end of this street of shops and noisy soldiers and sailors, by now.

"Come on," whispered Hallaway to his companion.

"Not so fast, my boys," said Edmund. "Rest like this weary, dreary, blind-eyed street, which twinkled, and flared, and stared, and roared, and laughed, only yesterday—*your* street, you young cubs, for you live in the scum of it, thank God."

They followed him down to the beach, protesting an anxiety to be at the chapel "in time."

"Sit down," said Edmund, and they sat on the dusty shingles, surrounded with ropes and rails—for this was the harbour side of the town—feeling horribly alone with him in spite of the proximity of an old sailor and a bathing-woman.

"Just one word before we part," said Edmund. "You were so kind to this poor

fellow who was drowned, you showed it in such nice ways, by never calling him names, for instance, on the day he died——”

Both boys turned white as a sheet.

“——That,” proceeded Edmund imperturbably, “I thought I would remember your example by raising the standard among you of brotherly love. And I will do it this way. The first spotted cur, big or little, whom I catch bullying any one—ay, even though it be another spotted cur—I’ll thrash, I swear I will, till he isn’t fit to crawl home. And I tell you that, that you may tell it to the first murderer whom you meet. Now be off with you!”

They slunk away.

Hallaway was the first to speak. “What the devil did he mean?”

“I never did nothink to young Ted,” said the other—“only a bit of chaff now and then.”

“Hulking cad to talk to us like that!” whimpered Hallaway, with dry hot eyes.

Edmund did not find it possible to follow them into chapel, though he knew who would be there. He was agitated, dispirited. His futile anger—he knew it was futile by their gait of injury—dropped harmlessly upon two whose natures were so elementary as theirs. It were as wise to be angry with a cat for tossing a mouse as with these boys for bullying the impotent of their kind. Besides, it ill accorded with the beautiful appearance which he made, to rail like Thersites.

But perhaps he really was a Thersites, inhabiting, say, the body of Paris; and that thought brought him to this point, that if these boys lied, he lied—lied with his face and his height. But people believed him: that was the great excuse!

He noticed now that a man with keen eyes over a pointed beard was gazing at him.

“May I speak to you a moment?” said this person.

"Well," said Edmund coldly.

"To speak shortly," said his questioner, "I am an artist. As such, I look for types that I may paint. I want to paint you, and I will pay you for it."

"Why?" demanded Edmund.

"Because, sir, you are the most splendid man I have ever seen."

"You mean that?" said Edmund searchingly.

"Certainly, sir."

"You see nothing through me—no dwarf-form crouching inside, following me line by line?"

"It is not an artist's business to see such things. As a matter of fact, I see you, no less, no more. If you had nothing but your head, I should want you. And it doesn't matter to me whether you slew Abel or stoned Stephen."

"You are asking a great thing," said Edmund.

"I know, sir, but, remember, you shall live again in my picture."

"That is a new way of lying," said Edmund.

"You didn't get your cheap wit at the shop where you got your face, I hazard," said the artist.

"You must pay me beforehand," said Edmund.

The artist reflected a moment. Then he said: "Here's my card and here's a sovereign. To-morrow at ten, please. Sitting, two hours."

"I shall charge you a guinea a day."

The artist whistled.

"I have the monopoly of myself."

"The devil you have!"

The two separated after agreement, and Edmund threw up his cap.

He followed this act with a bath, a symbolism by which he cleared himself of the hypocrisy of clothes, and had only one lie between himself and heaven. "But why, oh why," he asked himself, "should there be the

hypocrisy of clothes between that lie and the world?"

On his return home, his mother inquired: "who preached?"

"Lyminge," said Edmund briefly. He wished the bells would cease wagging in his ears. "I am going this evening," he observed.

"Again!"

He bowed over the table. He was half afraid of something happening if he lied too much.

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After tea, which was over by five, Mrs Weaverling returned from an interview with her husband and said: "Would you see Weaverling a moment, sir?" He complied with the request.

"I hear you'll be at chapel this evening," said the fisherman.

"Yes; can I do anything for you?"

"No, sir, but p'raps my Sunday togs would fit you."

"Oh, I see," said Edmund, smiling. "You think I'd like to be smarter."

"Sparks will be sparks," said the fisherman. He pointed to a drawer which contained some less characteristic clothing than that which Edmund wore.

"I'll not say nay," said the latter, and attired himself anew as directed.

"I wouldn't ha' asked, if I had thought you was vain," said the fisherman; "but I see'd you was not, and you do the eye more good in these clothes than in them clothes."

"You are so good," murmured Edmund. "And I——"

"Can you sing?" demanded the fisherman.

"Ay."

"It seems to me," said the fisherman, coughing somewhat, "that some be good and some can sing."

"'The lower lights'," quoted Edmund.

"Ay, lad, sing that."

Downstairs, with trembling ecstasy, Mrs

Weaverling listened to the wonderful voice uplifted in the heart-thrilling hymn that refuses not utterance from aught that will sound, though it be by the turning of handles, or the blowing of bellows, or the grip of hunger on the windpipe of a waif.

“ Let the lower lights be burning !
Send a gleam across the wave !
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save.”

“ With a voice like that,” said the fisherman, “ wot an evangelist you might be ! ”

“ ‘ Himself he cannot save, ’ ” quoted Edmund.

“ Ah, brother, everybody must say that who shall find his soul.”

“ I see yours in your face,” said Edmund.
“ You are shining, father—I mean brother.
God bless you.”

He hurried downstairs.

Oh, it was horrible, this farce of his beauty !
He stamped on the ground, and called himself a suicide, but the thought would not be stayed.

Then came another thought: "What business had I to bless my father, who have wished for myself in his despire?"

These clothes that he wore, the purchase of penury, of self-sacrifice, inflicted on him, for perhaps a minute, moral tortures equivalent to those endured by Hercules after he donned the garment of Nessus the Centaur.

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As he sat within the wide and airy and cleanly room, among people whom he knew quite well, but whom he was supposed not to know, he felt the intense desirability of home as a passion that struck him into awesome humility. The man who had shown him in had smiled as one who officiates for God, not as a part to be played with dramatic solemnity, but as a domestic and intimate factor in his relations with life.

And now a boy, wishing to sit next him, beckoned with that persuasive child-smile, which loosens our tears, and that loosened

his, and they hung in the abyss of his eyes, that grew in darkness against the glare of the naked lights.

The shining preacher with a voice that rose and fell—like water or like wind—drew out the overflowing hearts of the servants of Christ.

Spiritual waves ran through the room and abraded his roughened conscience and made a wound, and, in the dead silence of his fear and remorse, he cried to God, as it were through a ceiling of impervious rock.

To others it was open sky. To him it was rock. It was rock simply because he was rock, prepared to be crushed into senseless powder, unprepared for the quickening agony of the patriarch's rod.

He thought of his last application of the simile and smiled. Then he opened his eyes widely—they felt so keen and cool, and looked up a hymn, written with barbarous fluency, by Charles Wesley.

It was so funny that *he* should be singing

it that he sang his best, and many people glanced approvingly at him.

“But who or guile, or falsehood use,
Or take God’s name in vain, or swear,
Or ever lie, themselves to excuse,
They shall their dreadful sentence bear.

“The Lord, the true and faithful Lord,
Himself hath said that every liar
Shall surely meet his just reward
Assigned him in eternal fire.”

The tune went cheerily like a waltz, and acted as a tonic on his harrassed nerves. After this the smallest children trooped out, and the preacher continued the service with a view to awakening a spontaneous demonstration from the adults.

It was not long ere the spiritual waves surged once more, and the great words of the Redeemer fell, freshly as though His ministry had begun again, on the ears of Edmund.

“He that findeth his life shall lose it.”

Edmund reddened, for, accidentally or intuitively, the preacher’s glance met his. He

could not help feeling that he had in very literal manner found his life.

Well, he must lose it: what then? Should the law of tragedy and the malice of irony dash him to pieces against the prison bars of his ignorance he would be glad, he would give thanks. O the bitterness, the bitterness!

But he could give nothing else up—he swore it with the emphasis of a man sick unto death—he could give nothing up but life, life that was hateful, secretly impotent, intolerably humbled by its own shape and shapings, life that was hideous to have and to hold.

Why should God ask for it?

There, by the platform, a girl was giving herself up to the joy of a new inspiration, filling a vessel that she had emptied of self with the brimming love of God.

She communicated her longing and her satisfaction to the souls that surged about her and made her feel their strength as the wings of angels to bear her up.

Poor creature! What had she done, after all? She had no Great Lie to renounce. She had only a little trumpery to sacrifice, a little levity to subdue, a little impatience to control.

Would she, after all, do the small things that Christianity would demand of her after she appropriated it? As for Old Brewster, mumbling there in front, with infinite expense of spasms—painful to witness—that he would be “faithful unto death,” he was talking commonplace. His altruism was born of self-interest and necessity. Nietzsche was right—in recalling him he was overlaid with a memory alien to him, as his beauty—Nietzsche was right: Christian altruism was born of self-interest and necessity!

His speculation was absolutely free from satire; it was the grey air of veracity that hung about the shape of the Great Lie and deepened men’s belief in it. But, for all that, he was glad that, owing to his position, Old Brewster was unable to see him.

To be a critic—that was one thing, mused

Edmund as a summing-up: to be a liar—that was another. But, if the critic was born of the liar, why should the liar die? And how honourable it sounded, if to criticise well be a good thing, to bear the shame of criticising one's own lie as well as the glory of exposing the world.

All round him were flashing faces overbended knees or backs bent forward, and a murmur that grew in passionateness: "O God, be with us. Save *one* more, and Thine shall be *all* the praise."

"One more, one more," pleaded the preacher. "Anyone else?"

Over the question broke the singing that is also sobbing, and he sang too, missing out the passages that gave the singer to the Lord, and during this time his finger was locked in that of the little boy. And the spirit answered the flesh of him with a sneer—"the caress of a great lie, a great lie."

A snake's caress! Well, and why not?

And, as he bent forward, he heard an old

man behind him praying for the unannounced sinners yet in the room, of whom he was one: "Bring them to Thyself, dear Lord, O *do!*" and there was a kind of running chorus of "O do! O do!" and Edmund felt the Gospel thundering at his heart.

But still, though shaken and broken, he lived through the flashing lights and the insistent knocking: austereily silent, the Great Lie lived on.

Thank God it was over now! "I have neglected salvation," he thought, remembering one of whom the preacher had said that he died like a madman, with that one word, "neglected," on his lips. "I have neglected salvation, but in the end there shall be no more thunder, there shall be no more choice; there shall be the great peace, the eternal quiet."

The Great Lie rose to its full stature. "I am damned," he said gently to himself, and he passed out of the place, shaking hands with some of the "brothers" and "sisters."

"I am damned," he repeated mechanically, "but this I know. I know that human nature loathes finality, falls back in disgust from the necessity of choice. I await the facts, that is all. I have chosen nothing."

With that he turned with a certain relish to the south-westerly wind blowing in at the porch. His psychological motions might, indeed, remind one of the wind in their variety, but only of the sirocco in their quality. Signs of the *idée fixe* in a liar *malgré lui*, they pointed to an end from which he might well shrink.

Miss Charlotte and her friend, who had attended the service in the capacity of inquisitive Laodiceans, did not speak to him as they passed out, but they had not failed in observation. "The shabby black coat should disillusionise you, Charlotte," said the friend. "A masquerader would be still in the fisherman's garb, *n'est ce pas?* The black coat speaks too plainly for the actual resources."

"In that case," said the other, "it is clear

that naïveté has died out, except in religion, which remains dreadfully naïve, and noisy, too, one is sorry to confess."

"Console yourself: he remains handsome."

"That certainly is so, but to me he looked all nerves this evening."

"Poor extremist!" exclaimed the friend.

"Exit Greek god," said Miss Charlotte. "What a change! Proteus repudiates it. 'Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean.'"

Others—utter strangers to him—had also observed Edmund. Virginia, the woman who had seen his comedy of errors on the promenade, pointed him out to her father.

"They are like," he replied, "wonderfully alike; but look at the dress. Besides, nothing would have induced Edmund to come here. Moreover, he went down in the *Hardcastle* last Thursday."

He said it roughly, decisively; and he felt like a torturer or ever he felt her crying on his arm. But he was afraid of this impertinent plebeian who wore the face and form,

who sang almost in the voice, of his daughter's lover. "I am cruel to be kind," he reflected, meaning, no doubt, that family pride was tenderness in disguise.

Edmund was now in the possession of the evangelist.

"I have seen you come in and out, sir; but you don't attend our band meetings and bible-classes, and so our acquaintance is imperfect. Now, brother, shall we see you next Tuesday? We shall be delighted if you will come. I hope to hear better news of Brother Weaverling."

"He's in the Lord's hands, bless Him," said Mr Grainger, the class-leader, confidently. "My daughter, sir," he remarked abruptly, and Edmund shook hands with her.

The first thing of which he was conscious was that she was not so tall as he had thought her when his seeming height was less. The second thing was that her face wore a slightly supercilious aspect, and the third that her hand was feeble in its response.

The total impression was simply one of an individuality too poor to have insincerity chargeable to it.

Her feelings towards him as he was, were less pleasing in their expression than her feelings towards him as he had been, simply because now she wanted to seem as much like a lady as possible, and then she had merely wanted to be kind.

She and Edmund found themselves walking together behind her father and the minister.

"I heard something," she said, "about your having tried to rescue the poor boy."

"I didn't succeed," he said.

"Tell me about it," she pleaded, "if you don't mind."

Her voice was far more seductive than the sounds she had been able to evoke from the harmonium during the service, and he told his lying story with spirit and fidelity to its first edition.

"It was the Lord's doing," she said.

"Hum," he murmured. "Where is he now, think you?"

"In heaven."

"You were sorry for him, I heard."

"Who wouldn't be? he was shamefully bullied."

"You saved him some torment, I heard, and someone told me that he worshipped the ground you trod on. That was his heaven. How should there be another?"

"Oh, don't!"

"Now, tell me, Miss Grainger, how did you feel towards him? Are you able to love cripples?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I used to hate the sight of him, but I knew it was very wrong, and I trained myself to forget what he looked like. Poor Eddie!"

"You never showed your dislike?"

"I knew it was very wrong."

"How good of you to refrain!"

He looked steadily into her face as they halted at Mr Grainger's door. The wonder

and the glory of his face stole into her eyes and lodged in her brain.

Heedless of etiquette, she took off her right hand glove, ere saying farewell, that she might feel his personality more keenly as he pressed it with his.

He walked rapidly away, crying "Husks! husks!"

This was not the first time, then, that he had thriven on a lie. It had once been ready-made for him by Pity. He did better now, in truth, that he made it for himself.

CHAPTER VI

MONDAY morning found Edmund in the fisherman's garb again, his money jingling in the pocket.

He bought a straw hat and a cheap jersey, and, having donned them, he called on the artist.

The latter occupied a neat house in a clean road overlooking the east cliff. His face showed amazement on seeing Edmund. "I thought I had dreamed about you," he said. "Thank goodness, you're alive!"

He led the way through French folding-doors into a large studio.

On the wall was a spirited study for an uncompleted picture—Marsyas bound naked to a pine-tree, fear unspeakable in his

eyes, and, on the ground, his audacious flute for a sign of the insulted god. Round about, the Nysans, gloomily acquiescent, stared at Marsyas while Cybele pondered.

"Let me have you as you are, without a stitch," said the artist. "You shall be Apollo from henceforth."

"What is doing in that picture?" demanded Edmund.

"Marsyas is about to be flayed."

"Oh!"

"And you have willed it. Look cruel and relentless. Justify that fear."

The blood mounted slowly to Edmund's face. "I must be vain, too?"

"Everything, except kind."

When he had posed for about an hour, the artist said abruptly: "You see, now, why I didn't care a fig whether you were this or that. Here you are to see Pagan beauty inexorably vain. Cruel, too. And when the beastly torture's done, the god will make Marsyas into a Phrygian river, and much

good his victim will find for himself in that sloppy form."

With a sense of relief, Edmund concluded the sitting. He could not bear to see Marsyas tied to the death-tree for a trumpery piece of presumption.

He acquitted himself hastily, however, of any such design. He wanted an eminence under heaven, not above it. He demonstrated that to his own satisfaction by ordering an irreproachable grey suit at a tailor's. It would make him respectable, gentlemanly; the gods are not jealous of that.

It was surely mere vanity, though, that turned his steps after this from the unshaped outlines, the vast comfortableness of the east cliff with its unrailed lounges of natural velvet, its unupholstered footstools of rock, to the promenade. It showed the inherent weakness of his mental attitude—beauty exhibiting itself, happy in seeing rather than in being.

His intention naturally led him by way of a portion of the beach, whereon his shadow,

distorted by the shelving stones and pebbles, was powerless to receive the impress of any grace.

Edmund had a seaman's trick of looking mechanically for treasure whenever he paced the beach, and he was not distracted from his careful inspection of the miscellany under his feet by the presence of some mates of his father, who gave him a "hullo" in passing.

It was, therefore, rather a shock to his nerves when he came suddenly face to face with Old Brewster, who was engaged in a similar quest.

Old Brewster had a wallet on his back and a staff with a point to it; he, therefore, examined soft fabrics that interested him, such as scraps of old envelopes, delicate sprays of seaweed, etc., with ease, paying out the horror of bending his emotional head for the hard substances, such as whelks, and other shells, from which he could develop things, more decorative if less simple and pretty, for sale.

They stared at one another unpleasantly.

Edmund murmured a request for pardon, which was ignored.

"I've summat to show you," said Old Brewster. He deliberately opened his wallet, and from it extracted the half of a leaf of the local journal entitled *Up-to-the-Nines*, which was published every Monday.

This fragment—surviving a copy of the latest issue—contained the portrait of a man, drowned in the shipwreck of the *Hardcastle*, whose great personal beauty was made obvious even by the poor impression from a cheap process-block which represented him.

"Who's that?" snarled Old Brewster.

Edmund flushed deeply.

"Who's it like?" The words shot out sideways from the piston-motion of the old man's head.

"Like me, I suppose."

The usual group of small boys was now eyeing them from a distance.

The old man's articulation grew as strenuous as water rushing through an empty pipe :

“Christ deliver him from it, you—fake!”

“Take him away; he’s mad!” cried Edmund to anybody or nobody, for no one interfered. He strode away, leaving Old Brewster jabbering; but the horrible contempt of the words, “You fake,” danced in his head.

During the afternoon his spirits returned. He won five pounds—the amount of a wager between two young nabobs—for outstripping the record that one of them had made in the last regatta. To feel the oars twinkling in his hands, and his spirit, as it were, join hands with Neptune and hurry him along the track, was to taste, unadulterated, the new life; there was room for nothing else. Exhilarating too, was the excited admission of his “stunning pace,” and the “Bai Jove, we must enter you for the next regatta,” and the unfurling of the note, of which he intended to keep four-fifths to himself.

After that “crowded hour,” not more miraculous for him than for the nabobs, who,

however, would not deny the genuineness of the triumph of visible muscles over distance and weight, he read the piece of paper which Old Brewster had left in his hand, attentively, and obtained further information in the Public Library. It appeared that a cynic and *littérateur* resided in the person of the Edmund who had gone down in the *Hardcastle*. It did not stagger Edmund to reflect that this cynic and *littérateur* was strongly influencing his own thought-life at the present moment. He did not know whether to be glad or sorry—though it had brought him shame—that he wore the image and superscription of the drowned person. When he read that the latter had “been engaged to a charming and accomplished lady, daughter of an influential resident of this town,” the debated coincidence aroused a joyous devil in him. If one lies for life’s dear sake it is preparation towards lying for amusement. If insolent ugliness, glorying in its pious ineptitude, grudged him a mask so

superbly complete as that he wore, was it not a call to arms?

In other words, must not the Great Lie be paraded, must it not go through all the paces, tossing its coloured plumage, shaking its silver bells, the while? Must not the Great Lie, moreover, be a virile lie, careless of consequence, the parent of unnumbered lies? Parsimony in lying—the first and the last lie—makes the idealist cry: “Out, damned spot!” but prodigality in lying—the capering battalions of deception—dazzles even him, for it is life itself. It lives; it conquers.

There was a good deal about lying in the verses of his prototype. These, burning with hatred and contempt, had some fascination for Edmund as he pored over them in the Public Library; but it was not soothing to be thus fascinated. Others, full of the irony of one who has compromised with the best, who knows it and will not dare to mend, he really liked. This was himself—past and present. “We are subtle sinners:

thank God we're so very sensitive," they seemed to say. By his appreciation of them, his prototype and he seemed in perfect harmony, if not concord, even now.

When he returned home, a little before tea-time, the fisherman seemed surprised when he handed him ten shillings. The bank-note remained unchanged in his pocket.

"How did you manage it?" quoth the fisherman, "my mate Bill was round, and said you weren't nigh the boat during the forenoon."

"I was earning money by sitting for an artist," said Edmund.

"Eh, what's that?"

"Havin' his face painted, stupid!" said his wife.

"Them artists is no good," commented the fisherman; "and how might you be painted?"

Edmund told.

"Was that Apple-what's-'is-name a fisherman?" demanded his father.

"No—he was a god."

"There's but One," said the fisherman.

"Artists are only happy when they are making mistakes," said Edmund.

Mrs Weaverling hereat left the bedroom to admit Miss Grainger who had turned up for tea, as it happened, though she protested that she had only come to inquire after the health of the fisherman.

The latter's curiosity remained unabated.

"Well," he said: "You, a boatman, were painted as a god. How was it done?"

"First, I had nothing on, so I was in the image of my Maker."

"And you defiled that by calling it the god Apple?"

"I did."

"Well," said the fisherman, "it ain't for me to talk, perhaps; but I'd rather starve than be taken stock of by a heathen painter."

"You are worth more than you imply, I think," said Edmund.

"Look here," said the fisherman, "I ain't going to take money for them sittings."

"In that case you return two shillings."

The fisherman looked pathetically at the half-sovereign.

"The change will wait," said Edmund, and it did.

He entered the kitchen at a moment when Miss Grainger was looking her best. She was handing down cups and saucers, and, in the stretching of her arms, the white wrists showed prettily. The unpretentious cheerful dress she wore was free from the absurd inlaid-work at the bosom for which, as a rule, she had an unabashed regard. She seemed fitted with that grace which means more than perfectly, and that was because she was working with pleasure and without mental constraint in a woman's way. Her face had caught a tint from the fire, and Edmund felt unusually drawn towards her as she turned to greet him.

The tea was lightened by pleasantries

which were quite acceptable after the chilling conversation of the artist, and the seer.

She asked him if he ate the tails of shrimps; he inquired of her if she ate the whiskers or the black beady eyes.

"When you come to think of it," she said, "there is no reason why we shouldn't eat blackjacks."

"Don't; horrid thing you!" exclaimed Mrs Weaverling, choking in her tea-cup.

"Well, but shrimps are only sea-worms. They eat the dead things, don't they?"

Mrs Weaverling's face grew very stern, and only then did Miss Grainger realise how horrible a reflection she had called forth.

But Edmund lied boldly. "They eat nothing dead," he asserted. "They are afraid."

Just then Mrs Gotch came in.

"Don't mind me," she cried cheerfully. "Don't mind me! Now wot 'av' you been doin' to my boy?" she demanded of Edmund, shaking her finger archly. "He was afraid

to come: 'if that there Mr Edmund's there I won't,' he sez. Sez I, 'e won't bite!'"

"It is the inferiority of my bark which makes him suspicious," said Edmund.

"But, Lord!" said Mrs Gotch, without paying any attention to him, "I'm that skeered I can't tell!"

Wriggling with malicious joy, she permitted her feigned reluctance to yield to pressure.

"Well," she said at length, "Tammis Brewster told my husband Bill that—he-he-he! how can I say?—that Mr Edmund there is—he-he-he!—a dead man pretending to be alive."

She looked a veritable "connoid type" as she sat in the frowsy armchair, one red hand, indissolubly united to her wedding-ring by adipose fat, clasping a limp hempen bag, the other profusely perspiring over the inoffensive head of Dick.

Edmund noted that a serious determination that he should not laugh himself out of complicity in Old Brewster's announcement had

hardened her face, which was quite rigid about the lips, while the eyes were lighted up like the bull's-eyes of two dark lanterns, to track him down. How beautiful was motherly love!

"Is that all?" he asked.

Mrs Gotch lost her temper at this, and blurted out that she wasn't "ashamed to believe in the Devil. Call me soft if you like," she added indignantly.

The other women paled, but Edmund said calmly: "Give me some more tea, please."

Then he raised his eyes, and unshrinkingly met those of Mrs Gotch. "It appears," he remarked, "that I greatly resemble a man who was drowned when the *Hardcastle* went down. Let it be admitted, indeed, that I might be mistaken for him. What then? 'Singular,' you say. I would say that it would be more than singular if no two persons were alike in the whole world."

Mrs Gotch grunted, and said something about "lettin' folks judge for themselves.

Tammas Brewster ain't afflicted for nothin'," she added. "He sees things."

"People should ride their nightmares in bed, and stable them there," retorted Edmund.

He asked Miss Grainger if he might walk with her. The insincerity of the request was strategic. She complied with it.

They walked through a lane between cottages and meadows, and crossed a little brook. The landscape, under the mesmerism of twilight, seemed to sleep under their feet.

"What do you think of that rubbish?" he asked.

"Baa!" sang out a dolorous sheep, foreseeing the shambles, and that all grass is vanity. "Baa, baa!" sang out a responsive brother. The creatures lifted one by one the same abject face of alarm, and baaed, or bowed it down again in equally abject resignation, and nibbled.

"You hear what they say," said Edmund. "Do you say bah likewise?"

"Don't talk about it," she entreated.

By this time they stood in the furrowed path that leads to Cocoa-nut Hill. Suddenly he took her hand, and looked into her face.

"Do you see any dead thing here?" he said.

"No, I don't," she replied, convincingly.

He took off his hat, and she loved him for that sweep of brow and hand that marked him seemingly as freedom's own. She worshipped him as enshrining a beauty that was neither manly nor womanly but divine, a thing perfect in repose as only flowers are, perfect in motion as are only birds.

He led her up the hill, and talked of flowers to her, of that asphodel which had been raised up in his mind when his body changed; but, in the midst of his talk, her foot slipped, and, with a little scream, she sank down breathlessly on the slope. He delivered himself also to grassy ease, and lay with a face upturned to the sunlight, while the shadows of prowling oxen passed

overhead. She murmured something of the time.

"The time!" he echoed; "I take no count of Time till he comes up, like a pig, to be killed."

She laughed: the word pig always had a humorous effect on her.

"Take care of the ox!" she squeaked.

"And the pig will take care of itself," added Edmund. Out of mere spite he had assumed a senseless habit of Scriptural parody.

And so for her Time was not killed, for she felt the sweetness of protection in his mock guardianship of her, and, as the moments flitted away, Time's tick of them grew tender, and she worshipped him.

Yet she was thinking of nothing; but as she plucked, in her ignorance of asphodels, a stem of dolly-grass and gently tickled his neck with it, she was feverish with gaiety, and her hand trembled.

And as he remained motionless, still watching the oxen—now and then pretend-

ing that a bull was among them—she grew more passionate with the dolly-grass and stuffed a handful of it into his pockets.

For him the idyll was irritating: it was not an idyll of Theocritus. Theocritus!—was that name, too, in the vague repertory of his second youth? The fisherman's son had never known it.

He rose hastily and swept the earth from himself with haste. They walked slowly away, and, as they walked, he held her hand. Such a dry little hand it was, yet it clasped his firmly, and such a small voice it was that twittered a wee joke, and gurgled the most accommodating of laughs, a laugh that was just a reflection of hearts-ease and nothing more. It was a laugh of possession, there was no forecast in it. He was by her side in the fair world of the good God, and it was enough.

She was by his side, therefore, but that was not enough for Edmund. He opened his mouth wider. In his extravagant love

for himself he craved all worldly delights; she symbolised an element of satisfaction, but in herself she did not satisfy.

Still, inasmuch as she had played with him and affronted him (for a sign that he was human to her), he gave a decisive indication of his impetuous temper.

All his antagonism to law had been awakened by Mrs Gotch, who, after all, was no worse for not breaking it.

There, in the hollow of the hill where Time was sleeping in the lap of Nature, he kissed her, and, with the imprint of the Great Lie on her cheek, she returned home richer for all she had given away.

CHAPTER VII

EDMUND had given away nothing: he had only tantalised himself to the point of desiring that he might fling his life away royally. Still, that he might not, in a moment of insobriety, make one duck of his bank-note, he cashed it at a tavern over a glass of ale. Then he ran down to the sea by a blind instinct; but for him this night the sea began and ended in the surge of blood in his veins.

As he crashed through Baker's Gap, he saw the gleam of a lantern among the boulders, and he heard the chink of coin.

Four young labourers were playing with cards for money. Such was the changing that was going on where he had changed.

"This is sacrilege," he said severely.

"What does Molly say?" asked the tallest of the players.

"Are you aware that 'the wages of sin is death'?" asked Edmund, stretching out his forefinger.

"No harm in losing 'em in a jolly gamble then; they aint much to keep," said the other.

"Old Ryan, do git at 'im," observed his comrade.

"Old Ryan—if you are indeed old," said Edmund, gravely scanning the rubicund downless face of that muscular person—"Old Ryan, let me remind you that a hundred and fifty men—not to speak of women and children—were cut off in the bloom of youth in the shipwreck of the *Hardcastle*, only twenty miles north-west of this very spot."

"Oh, I say, Queen Anne is dead," said Ryan with an air of great surprise.

The others giggled.

"Young man," said Edmund, "never let me

hear you say that again. Have you never recited the Apostles' creed? Queen Anne is *not* dead. She is partaking of a glorious resurrection. Round her head is a nimbus; in her hand is a harp. She is no longer *Queen Anne*, it is true, and you will forgive me, brother, if I have spoken amiss, she is no longer *Queen Anne*, but she has made the acquaintance of her six children. In heaven, too. It is seldom you find a whole family there (indeed her illustrious father is absent): but the children died young."

"Oh, dry up!" cried Ryan. "Shy a stone at him, Alf."

"Sling your hook," remarked the latter person, "unless you want to play."

"Suppose I do play," said Edmund. "Do you think I cannot?"

"Snufflers don't as a rule."

"It is motive makes or mars the game," said Edmund. "You are jealous; afraid. I cannot be jealous or afraid. I know I shall win."

"Oh, I say!" cried Alf.

"Certainly I know. Satan is sure to tempt me this first time. What are you playing for?"

"Browns."

Edmund shrugged his shoulders. "Browns! If it comes to that, why don't you play with the stones?"

"What the pleecemun *would* you play with? Fivers?"

"That is a sneer, brother," said Edmund with a pained look. "But admit that you gamble—a fearful and delicious sensation I must suppose, since you gamble here—since you make yourselves at one with old pots and boots and kettles to gain it—admit that you gamble, why do you weaken that sensation, till it is worth nothing at all, by playing for browns? I should choose shillings. If, moreover, I indulged the low, sordid motive of self-betterment at my neighbour's expense, I would have the pluck to stake my all."

"Shall we play his game, Alf?" said Ryan :
Alf sulkily agreed.

The game of Nap—stipulated for by one of the young men—was now explained to the patient and receptive ear of Edmund.

As a cat watches a mouse he scanned with a tingling delight the anxious faces of his foes.

"You do not seem to appreciate the historical suggestions of the game," he said pleasantly, when he was about to clean them all out. "Dismiss all thoughts save those of the patriot. I call 'Wellington.'"

The four others glared and grinned alternately. What was he going to do?

"Well," said Ryan with a jerk, "Satan *has* tempted you."

"True, friend," said Edmund, with a malicious smile, "Satan has tempted me ; but I repudiate Satan." His hand went to his pocket ; their looks hung on him. He withdrew two sovereigns, change from his bank-note. "Satan has tempted me," he repeated slowly. "I have won two pounds. But I

repudiate Satan—so! One, two, three, and away!”

The money went whizzing through the air and sank, insignificantly, into the sea.

It is worth no more than the stones now,” said Edmund. “I have done with gambling.”

He turned to leave them; but Ryan stood in the way. “None of your blarney,” he cried; “you’re a sharper.”

“I am, am I?” said Edmund. “And that’s the cant of the losing gambler, is it?—that you are not so sharp as me? A nice lot you are!”

“Don’t believe he threw away good money,” said Alf.

The others took up the cry, and Edmund, his green eyes scintillating with a special joy, slapped his pocketful of silver till it rang. “I am going to thrash you one after the other,” he said. “Ryan first.”

He soon found himself fighting them altogether. It is doubtful if he could have enjoyed himself more, stalking like Hercules

through the twelve labours, or like Tannhäuser forgetting the Pope in the Venus-mountain. Ordinary civilisation fails to afford a parallel to his feeling of glee. Long after the lantern had guttered out, he was hitting right and left, and straight before him. Ah, how masterly was the Great Lie! It was they who stumbled on the sightless stones, not he; they, who made the air hideous with a coprolaliac clutter, not he. Even Ryan's blow that struck his upper lip and made it feel larger than life, only increased his enthusiasm of self-confidence. The fight ended with the silent desertion of the two younger combatants, followed by a truce.

"Well, I suppose this proves nothing," said Ryan, when he was knocked down for the seventh time.

"Nothing required proof," said Edmund, haughtily. "You were insulting and I was resentful: that is all."

"Why did you make up like a parson, then, and interfere and spoil the luck?"

"I am not a parson," said Edmund coldly. "I merely happen to agree with parsons on a point or two. Gambling is one. As for the luck, someone always has it, I apprehend. My luck does not depend on my being a thief. Can you grant that?"

"It was your chucking it away," said Ryan.

"Ah," said Edmund. "It shall return unto me after many days."

"Well, you're a rum cove," said Ryan. "I'm off."

"Good night," said Edmund; and he stood alone, well knowing that the bruised and battered, yet still gallant youth, now scrambling up Baker's Gap, had decided that he, Edmund, was more gallant still.

It was now eleven o'clock, and the fever in his blood was but requickened by success. It was not the sea that spoke to him even now; it was the promenade, dreamy, and gay, and chattering. He skirted the edge of the rocks with the agility of a mountaineer, and scrambled up the parapet of the fishmarket in

less than half-an-hour. Soon he was tramping the road, oblivious of all save the sly promptings of the Great Lie. He, in himself, was Nature; a Marine Terrace, however drab and paramount a matter, could not stand between him and the sea, for the sea was in his blood; he knew it. He bounded up the steps of the undercliff, led merrily to his goal by the livid brilliancy of the electric light. His pulse measured the imminence of the impending presence he sought as in a half-dream.

It came at last.

"Why, Ned, I haven't seen you for an age; where do you come from?"

He did not know this person, but the thought did not trouble him for an instant.

"Where do you?"

She gazed at him quizzically.

"You're the one to ask, ain't yer? Well, I've been to Parry—the money came in handy; it did that! I was down in the mouth. I was dying for a holiday. But

what do you mean by this rig-out? And what's wrong with your potato-trap. You ain't been fighting on your 'unny-moon, 'ave yer?"

"Oh, I'm not married yet," said Edmund.

She beamed on him. "Oh, this is gettin' thick! And the slops; you ain't told me of them."

Surely she was alive as she seized his arm and marched him down the promenade, owning every bit of him as it seemed. Yes, she was alive, alive as a flame of gas in front of a draper's shop. It was wonderful.

"I've not been home yet, Ned. I've just been pottering about. I tell you, I've been real miserable."

They had passed from the promenade into the churchyard.

"I don't like churchyards!" she announced, decisively. "There are ghosts about."

"Oh, no," said Edmund in surprise. "No one is allowed to walk on the grass."

"Drop it, Ned. It's not nice to die, anyhow."

"It is easy," said Edmund, quietly.

"How do you know : have you been through it?"

"Once or twice."

She laughed. He liked the sound, hard though it was; and turned round to look at her.

Yes: she was handsome; her eyes were good. He told her so.

"Yours are not what they were," she retorted. "My! but they had a devil in them!"

"They look deficient because you've been looking through a spotted veil," said Edmund.

They passed into Transpontine Street, and in one of the purlieus of that thoroughfare paused at a brush-shop.

"Can you spare time to sit and talk a bit," said the woman.

"I suppose I can," said Edmund, slowly; he was growing afraid.

She opened the private door and led him into a sitting-room abutting on to a side-street.

His eyes, roving over it, noted a piano, a sewing-machine, a photograph advertising the tooth-powder used by a person in an astonishing hat, and a gracious picture of Eve in the garden.

"It will serve as a keepsake," she said, as her eyes followed him.

"When did I give it you?" he asked.

"There was no one but Alice *then*," she snapped. On the mantelpiece he saw a photograph of Edmund-the-Minor smiling at him.

"Play us a choon," said Alice, opening the piano.

"I can't," said Edmund.

"Fiddlesticks! you used to."

He went to the instrument and raised the lid from the top, whereupon the front threatened to fall off. She plucked it away, remarking: "it *is* a rummy Pie-Anna, ain't it? but I'd rather 'ave it any day than one of them measly armoaningums." Edmund raised the lid from the keyboard, and the sorry skeleton stood bare. Under his eyes were the notes

—poor crumbling bones that had partly broken away from the wood on which they were mounted.

But just as a kiss on a withered cheek may bring tears from the depths of the unwithering heart, so the caress of those dirty and greasy-looking notes might awaken phantom melodies, sweet though faltering, deep though tinkling, from the heart of the old piano. Heavily lay the years upon it; not less heavily the latent memories imbibed through hands now still, and voices now silent.

Edmund, dawdling as it seemed before the bookless-rest, was lifted momentarily by a new ambition. He would make the unresisting victim of the vampirer, the limping Corybante scourged into performing the antics of the dance, speak for once in the voice of its hidden self, a self enriched by dishonour, through an utterance diminished by age. Surely it would be a voice to recall a dead mother, and with her a youth with no blacked-out page irremovable from the book, and, with the return

of youth, would not a great madness betide her and a great despair? Would he not have unravelled for him the mystery of her identity? He did not know that the piano was second-hand from the mothers of other persons than Alice; that its tragedy was its own absolutely; that nearly all her furniture was second-hand; that the woman was too poor or too wise to preserve solid mementoes for a museum of *The Age of Innocence*; that her present passion sang to her from everything worth looking at in the room.

Certainly—though he was too clever to divine it—it was not the piano that would recall the dead mother. As for the tune—well, he had in his head a melody that has derided primness and laughed from the heart of Love's generosity ever since Blangini wrote it down; and if one hear it without the words there is a little sob in it; and the sob may echo his nearest sorrow.

Edmund heard the music over a bridge of silence: his fingers itched.

He would teach this woman that there are strains more moving—in her language, “measly”—than the wheezing of a consumptive world lost in the cold of eternity and space : that the mining of the heart achieves a choicer melancholy than the muffling of the brain.

“You *are* a slowcoach,” said Alice.

Suddenly, with disagreeable emphasis, a few of the words came. They contrasted oddly with the dead-mother pathos that he had assigned to the music—“La Mamma non chiamar”!

Edmund was, however, frightened, not amused. How and why did the words come to him at all? Why, indeed, did the tune come? but the spontaneous coming of the tune was more natural than the spontaneous coming of the uninspired words. Something similar had happened before, and he had rather rejoiced at the newness of resource which it implied. But now he knew that he wanted to reside alone in his beautiful body ; he did not like to be over-run with impressions without reference or date.

He touched the harsh—almost curded—surface of the notes and drew back in revolt.

“I cannot play,” he said ; but the melody throbbed through his moving fingers to tell him that he lied.

“Bosh!” she cried. “You shall have some whisky, and then——Come, Ned,” she broke off, “I know it’s got to be, and that though, maybe, you’ve quarrelled with her you’ll make it up, or she will, and I know what’s in you that ought to make me glad to see the last of you, but your face wins, Ned—wins all along the line. I don’t know what your dodge is with them slops or how you got them marks ; but it don’t matter, Ned, your face wins, my dear. I said it to myself that first day we met on the undercliff. I say it now.”

Not much time had passed since his revulsion of fear ; but he—who gave himself up like dust to wind—was whirled into another mood.

After all, he was here: "committed," he whispered to himself. If, moreover, he could reason that he was two he was certainly one. And if it were derogatory to say two in one, what of that? He had not boasted much of individuality in the old days.

Tempting was the border of the abyss; resolutely to break from methodism into the downy chaos of the elemental dark, was to pass from the fidgetty human into the paganly divine.

He kissed her, and her almost biting response excelled his delirium in the suggestion of hunger.

"What will you be doing, Ned, when you have married the angel?" she inquired.

"I shall be living downstairs, I suppose," he replied with forced humour.

There was silence. She laid her hand on his: it felt boneless and clammy.

"Straight, Ned," she said, "it's odd how double-faced you men are, when the face wins—like yours. But we want you the

more, the more shabbily you behave. We pay for your fine faces. Ah, Ned, Ned, and, because one is hard-up, a few pounds will make it all right, won't they?—Strike me silly, man," she cried abruptly, "but I've given you the blues!"

"I own I am bothered," said Edmund, as indeed he was, with another man's history tacked on to his own.

Hereupon she bent over him, and pressed her cheek coaxingly to a bruise on his; perhaps knowing how the contact would agitate him.

"You always were good-natured, Ned—you are thinking what will become of me. Oh, I'm all right. I shall really make dresses this time. You can get me some commissions, can't you? It makes one good to sew," she added, in a tone as incredulous as the words were precise; "it makes one patient and humdrum. And then, the tips of one's fingers get corny, and one's mouth gets pursed with holding pins, and one's

eyes get the saucy look taken out of 'em with peering into the stitches; and then, one gets the musty smell of stuff into the room where one lives, and nobody's nothing more than a clothes-horse."

"Don't," said Edmund.

She patted his cheek. "I'm not blaming you, old boy. It's a way to live, and I know you done what you can."

Edmund stared sombrely at the sewing-machine. Would it ever subdue this woman? Was it well to wish it? She patted him again, and his blood obliterated his thoughts.

"I think, you know," she said confidentially, "that I shall get interested in my soul after a time. When one's locked up, one's soul is the little mouse that goes scratch, scratch; and the catly devil is outside; and one could talk with the little mouse, if one could understand it. I can't. There's that Mr Lyminge knows a thing or two. I shall try him. But while you live, Ned, how can

I? For you said . . . well, never mind what you said. But I believe you love me, Ned, and that we met because you wanted me, even now!"

"Ned is past wanting anything of women, now," he said indignantly, but too deeply immersed in an appreciation of this intrigue to communicate his meaning more clearly.

"You are sulky, Ned," she said, "but I don't blame you. You must have some poison at once."

Heedless of the outrage on her landlady involved in summoning her at this time, she rang the bell, and while she was arranging some things about the room, he rose and looked straight into the likeness of his alter-ego. What was the meaning of his death and judgment? Was the same pit laid for him, the whilom Christian enthusiast, that was dug for that cynic-in-decay? Was he to take up the thread of some greater lie than this which enveloped him? Was he to take up the thread of that greater lie, and

coil it about the feet of women? It was coward's work!

"I am going," he said.

"Not now," she pleaded.

For answer, she opened the window and threw out his hat.

"I have you," she said. "There!"

Susceptible though he was to all the humiliation of the position, he fell by deliberate intention; since he mentally surrendered himself to her while looking before and behind the meaning of his conduct. He was, indeed, in that condition which, by the commanding arrogance of the senses, reduces any reasoning, however clear, to a mere extravagance of brain-action, unbearable to look back upon.

At that moment the door opened, and the landlady appeared with a tray and the angry exclamation on her lips that she had left it on a slab outside the door, and that, if she hadn't happened to be ironing away the sins or creases of habit, she would have

been abed and asleep like any ordinary compound of flesh and blood.

But before she could utter a word Alice was saying, "This is an old friend, Mrs Faudel. Bring another glass, please."

With a white face, Edmund turned round and faced the new-comer. She saw the features of a man drowned and dead, with bruises on the mouth and cheeks, such as the relentless rocks inflict on them whom the sea has eschewed. She gave a shriek, and the tray fell, and the spirit ran down the floor.

"The fool!" cried Alice, and followed the flying woman, who had locked herself into her room, and would not be spoken to again that night.

Edmund stopped a moment, dazed. Then he seized the photograph of Edmund-the-Minor and broke the glass. Then, confronted with mere jagged fragments and scratched card-board, he grew cold in the midst of the melodrama; for there was no end, discoverable by mere bad temper, to the

chilling sneer of the soul that regarded him behind its presentment.

Realising that, he leaped through the window into the street.

It was long past midnight. He could not go home: he slept till the dawning on the hills.

On waking, he shed bitter tears, all of them for himself. He wept because he felt depressed in body: he did not rise to the stature of the hills. He wept because he had fallen into atramentous depths of himself, fallen without profit, with nothing but the fall to think over. He wept—if he had dared to know it!—because the woman who had brought him to this pass was not a lady, and because the house she lived in was not a villa. He wept because he was afraid he would meet her again. He wept because he was afraid to meet any one. He wept because he was only one of the two tenants of the body called by their joint name. He wept because he had flouted high heaven,

which gazed with omniscient ageless eyes far above him even unto the rim of the sea. Ah! and most of all he wept because he would not say, “‘Father, I have sinned.’”

“That, at least, is impossible, because I have not sinned, and there is no sin,” he murmured; but the inmost law of his being was broken, and he knew that he lied.

CHAPTER VIII

HIS steps were indeterminate and feeble as he moved homewards. He had violated that sense of exclusiveness—the “feeling-I” of the metaphysician—and was henceforth in promiscuous relationship with all men. Something had shouted in his body imperiously and commanded him, and it was the common voice of the multitude, and it was he. A quality at once inspiring and restraining, which had distinguished Edmund-the-Ugly, and made that person fastidious and finely-sensitive, was not present in Edmund-the-Beautiful. Edmund-the-Beautiful had no desire to select before he enjoyed, if selection

implied delay. Edmund-the-Ugly accounted a lie a high price to pay for a day's disobedience; Edmund-the-Beautiful *was* a lie. That fact estranged these two persons almost beyond mutual recognition.

Nevertheless, unreadiness to lie as well as injured pride was a cause of the slowness of Edmund's return. He seemed to have accomplished a "thousand and one nights' entertainments" before he hit upon a plausible story.

There was, however, no present need to tell it: his father was worse. He merely assured Mrs Weaverling that he regretted his unavoidable detention, and, after a hasty toilet, he slunk out of the cottage.

"I have no place here," he thought. "I am too nervous to go up and down with this illness. I am too conscientious. I saddle my mind with my father's imprudence, and it makes me ill. I don't want to hear bulletins. It makes me anticipate the last. I want to forget, ignore. I want endless

excitement or an ocean's depth of rest—sleep."

He found it hard to face the artist, who read him through at a glance, half amusedly, half contemptuously.

"Are you going to put all you see of me in that picture?" inquired Edmund.

"Only the surface, and not the damaged part of that: for you've been fighting, by Jove! The substratum I shall omit altogether. It's as plain as a pike, and as beautiful and as interesting. I see it swimming up in your eyes."

"Indeed."

"Yes, but it don't make you any more like Apollo, I fancy."

"What is the difference?"

"Apollo is Passion seated on a throne with Beauty for his wedded wife."

"And I?"

"You are Beauty seated on a throne with Passion for your paramour. And you are ashamed of her!"

"How so?"

"You are furtive, tremulous. You sit in judgment on yourself. No one judges Apollo, not even Apollo. If it were otherwise, do you suppose that Marsyas, by one red wound, might inflict his pain on the world to-day?"

"I suppose not."

"No, sir. The gods never hush things up. Their reparation is not repentance but pity."

"And I," said Edmund softly, "must repent."

"Every man," said the artist, "who would be immortal, or know the gods, must, with his own chisel, in patient agony, chip away his own callosity. Every man—and yet I had an idea that you were not a man!" He stopped, smilingly.

"There is a point," said Edmund, "beyond which a man cannot laugh at himself. I am at that point."

"A man laughing at himself," said the

artist, "is, at any stage of his life, a weird figure. But you may laugh at me—at others. There is no harm in that."

"What did you mean," asked Edmund abruptly, "by saying that you did not think I was a man?"

"In common with others," replied the artist, "I thought that you might be Edmund-the-Minor—I allude to his verse—come back after a quarrel with Virgil or Dante."

"With a better knowledge of hell than either, perhaps?"

"Who shall say?" returned the artist, hesitating for a repartee.

"For him," said Edmund, "hell has no boundaries—even now; but he is not precluded from feeling acutely what he knows imperfectly."

When the sitting was over, Edmund went to the tailor's to have his new coat tried on, and stumbled down to the sea, "awearied and weary."

The words ran into a tune in his head,

and he could not avoid showing a little of the affectation of a man who makes sad music to please a paying crowd.

Everybody, indeed, seemed to stare at him to-day; everybody seemed impelled to choose his boat—ladies and gentlemen and children.

And this day, whether it was because the calm still air carried holy lightnings down from the heavenly blue into dull eyes and grudging hearts, or because the more gracious of our kind were abroad by a coincidence of choice, the ladies whom he rowed were instinct with an ethereal charm that reproached him for choosing the base instead of the noble in others that were women, too. He could not help looking behind, even when his boat scudded over a path strewn fair with sunbeams. And a child stretching out arms to him in candid love of his beauty nearly drew the manhood from him and exposed the crying babe.

He responded by singing a sensuous song

of his poetical namesake in a mellow voice that made the child's mother marvel.

“Row, row, swift or slow—
Sky above and sea below ;
The path of the day is wan and faint :
The face of the sun, like an aureoled saint,
Pallidly golden, shines like snow.
Drift, drift, slow or swift—
The clouds are the hands of a child uplift,
Pretending to hide glad eyes that peep
At the chrysolite plain of the darkling deep.”

The woman started violently, and it required all Edmund's skill to avoid an upset. “What do you know of that poet?” she demanded.

“Less than he knows of me,” replied Edmund drily.

“You might have been brothers,” she said, adding to herself, “I must tell Virginia of this ;” and because he had pleased her child, and because she wished to test his behaviour under obligation, she paid him twice his fare.

“She has measured my worth exactly,”

thought Edmund as he put the money in his pocket, and hated the precision of justice in this our world.

It was a sign of his greatness—not as a liar, but as an immortal—that the failure of his new manhood renewed his devotion to the things that are alive at the roots. An ugly phase of his life was developing with his exaction of indemnity for past suffering, and his reception of immediate reward for service rendered. He was artist enough to look with dismay at a career made up of commercial transactions.

But there was one thing, false or true, which was not a commercial transaction—salvation. Desperately as he had believed in it in the past, insincerely as he had trifled with it in the present, its conception was too pure, its fruit too lovely and wholesome, for it to assume, even in the misty region of Doubt, a face less fair than the proven truths of the world.

“What distinction it gives people to be

good," thought Edmund, as he found himself in the class-room awaiting the opening of the band-meeting, together with the girl who had "found the Lord" last Sunday evening. She was the daughter of a washerwoman, and it seems a less high and mighty thing to be a washerwoman than an artistic or titled whitewasher; but, as he saw her looking through the east window, upon the hills that wore the riband of the sunset, she seemed with her eyes to traverse a distance greater than aught that caste may set up between man and man.

She said "good evening," and continued her outward gazing. "She has not seen me," thought Edmund. Yesterday, he would arrogantly have thought: "She has seen a lie and believed it."

Presently in came Miss Grainger; and the feeling that he had acted badly to her made him hard again.

"We met at chapel," he said as though to say: "We have not seen one another since."

"And afterwards?" she hazarded.

"Oh, that was the 'meeting of the waters,'" he replied.

"Good-gracious, what have you done with your face?" was all she said.

Then Old Brewster came in, but Edmund did not retreat; he felt it was not wise to shun the seer; besides, the latter seemed confused at seeing him there.

"One can leave when one likes, thank goodness," said Edmund to Miss Grainger; "but in the chapel I was afraid of becoming a part of the building—the pews are so sticky."

Old Brewster was praying: the convulsive movement of his head stopping as though a devil in it were exorcised. The little wriggly, final spasms were like the death-agony of a hanging man.

Suddenly, the chattering ceased, for the evangelist had entered. "Let us pray," he said, and fell on his knees.

He prayed as he always prayed, as though

it were for the first time, and his knees were on the steps of the Throne.

Edmund might pray as one from whom prayer is wrested by dire necessity for grace : this man prayed as one who by grace has an unbroken communion with God. Prayer flowed from him not less freely because he had prayed with his family in the morning, and alone in the twilight. Permission to pray, Edmund dare almost think, was the sovereign answer to all prayer.

Here and now the evangelist prayed for tolerance and charity, for childlikeness, for humility—for Christlikeness.

“We know, Almighty God,” he said, “that to be like Thy dear Son is the only way to be beautiful before Thee. The passing shows of the world are vanities in Thy sight ; let them be so in ours. Let us not be envious of others that enjoy them, or exhibit them ; let us leave the judgment to Thee. Thou art He of Whom the Psalmist said : ‘The heavens shall declare his righteousness : for

God is judge himself.' Thou art the Father of Whose Son, our Saviour, it was written by the prophet : ' He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.' O God, save us from the pride that judges by sight or sound, from the feebleness that frets because the wicked flourish in the courts of iniquity and are held in honour and repute. ' Let us not judge one another any more : but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.' "

Familiar as he was with band meetings, Edmund knew that the applicability of this prayer to the quarrel between himself and Old Brewster was intentional on the evangelist's part. As it was, he would rather have been judged by Old Brewster than have had this justice done him. He caught the evangelist's eyes resting upon him with a tender smile in them, as though to say, " You have done well to forgive and forget ; your presence here has cleared you in my soul ; " but Old

Brewster had shut his eyelids tightly and kept them thus.

The kindness in all the women's faces—these fragile women, fresh from their humble work in shop or factory, or their own busy homes—filled him with remorse.

He could not sing the strident song which they softened with their heart's love, standing the while. He kept his seat in mute confession of his inability, and there crept over him, and, as it were, shone from him a kind of ecstasy of estrangement from the dear people about him, and the precious faith which they held and declared.

They saw the outer-man, the reverent, the applausive, and admired and pitied him; but he knew the inner-man that withdrew vainly from thoughts that the wind and sea repudiated, thoughts that were surely to be the prey of the cavernous depths that brought them into being.

What did it mean, this subduing of his power to lie unto himself?

He stared with humble wide eyes at the faces which glowed in the Presence, as they conceived it, of God. O! he was willing to think that there was no escape from their love, no escape from their faith, salvation from their prayers!

The homely irradiated, the natural spiritualised, the flesh reincarnated mysteriously, invisibly, as the flower is transmuted by the dew—"Have you seen it?" he demanded of the whole world.

They were kneeling now, he among them, by the forms.

To him, drunk with the lees of life and yet thirsty with the husks, to be among these people was the position of a starving beggar at a banquet, anxious, beyond sway of conscience, to steal.

Yet he remembered having been fed . . . ah! how long ago . . . and not a fortnight either. "O God!" he murmured, "teach me not to think."

One after another those about him acknow-

ledged their own beggarliness in a former life, and invited all other beggars to eat and drink, nay, more—to be whole, to be purified in a quenchless flame, to be visual in an inextinguishable light. Only this—he must believe.

All of these, but one, had said the same thing fifty times a year to his brethren on his bended knees, but the knees were never weary, and the news might never stale.

And now the washerwoman's daughter was telling, in her own way, how she had thrown the door of her heart open, and had met the splendid Lover on the threshold ; but he could not, O ! he could not !

He tried laughter as an antidote. Her aspiration was really very funny. She had a way of tacking on h's to vowels in the middle, as well as at the beginning of her words. As thus : " I feel reanimated—the heevil is gone, and I know He is sufficient for hall my needs, wotsohever they may be.

‘[H]all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood.’”

“She will save on her ribbons, she means,” muttered Edmund; but he knew that he—not she—was the hypocrite.

Or he tried to divert himself by the strange harsh counterpoint of the prayers, a development caused by the evangelist’s ecstatic praises of God being thrown across the loud admissions of favour and grace made by kneeling brothers.

But laughter availed him nothing, for gospel-truth sounded clearly under it all, if not above it—as it would through a hurricane of h’s, or a babel of litanies, if needs were.

In fact, his attempt at laughter only rediscovered the snob in him, that stale product of education and prosperity; and *What am I?* the mad Chilonian question, made him sicken, even while he sneered at it.

And vainly his surface beauty flashed to the authentic wisdom and peace of the Metho-

dists' faces ; for their ignorant praise of him was nothing, and the angels were looking on.

No cruel myrmidon thrust him into outer darkness—and Old Brewster had his eyes shut—but he wore the darkness as a robe. It was on his hands to mar his deeds ; it was on his feet to trip them up in the race for freedom ; it was over his eyes—open as they might be—to blot them ; it covered him altogether ; he was aged in it.

“ Perhaps Brother Brewster has something to say,” suggested the evangelist.

In the *staccato* fashion, which cost him so many spasms, the old man said :

“ Lord . . . when I . . . see wot others can't . . . teach me how to spik . . . or . . . ho'd my tongue.”

“ Teach us all,” said the class-leader, “ not to mistake suspiciousness for a gift of seeing clearly.”

“ Amen,” said Old Brewster.

“ Have you anything to say, Brother Edmund?” inquired the evangelist.

“I cannot pray aloud,” he murmured, and his silence was filled by the class-leader who thanked God that they were all saved.

His meaning stoned Edmund who was revealed to himself as clearly as though he stood on a floor of chrysolite.

He was too sick to pray. Alone, he searched the miserable cramped cellars of his brain where was no sun, and only a trembling taper to show dimly the creatures that crawled on the mildewy floor. They—the miser-hoard of his insatiate memory—were so foul and ugly, that he needed to turn the door—the beautiful door that men and women loved to behold—upon them, and lock them up.

There was another hymn, incomparable with the last. Ah! it was the voice of the shining he saw in their faces:

“In sorrow He’s my comfort, in trouble He’s my stay;

He tells me ev’ry care on Him to roll;

He’s the ‘Lily of the Valley,’ the Bright and Morning Star;

He’s the fairest of ten thousand to my soul!”

“Ten thousand!” echoed the evangelist, “if it were ten million, it would be the same. There is a beauty of the flower; be glad in its day—it is but a day. There is a beauty forged out of suffering and self-sacrifice, and love that is everlasting: give that the worship of your lives—consecrate yourselves to its service; for that is the beauty of Christ Jesus Who died for you, for you, for you.”

He pointed his finger gravely.

“This beauty is in the inmost part, from whence it moves outward: it cannot, therefore, be put off and on, or drawn aside by any man. He who has it has done with pride, for he has given himself up; he has accepted the sacrifice on Calvary. Before that Cross on which the Son of God submitted Himself to Death, dare we carry any of the nails that pierced Him? Pride is one of them; selfishness is one of them; hypocrisy is one of them. Let us pray ‘to be nothing, nothing’ in comparison with His will.”

With eyes still shut, Old Brewster said
“Amen.”

Then the evangelist solemnly pronounced
the apostolic benediction of St Paul.

He had scarcely finished, when a strong
hand sent the door flying inwards, and a
voice cried, “Is the mester here?”

The evangelist stood in the doorway, and
talked with the speaker, and Edmund heard
murmurings of “a girl up Transpontine
way . . . taking in a ghost . . . about scared
out of her wits . . .”

The flash of horror, by which he saw his
lie pale to transparency, afflicted him with
a feeling of bodily ineptitude amounting to
sickness; but it did not confuse his percep-
tion of the small-talk that passed around
him.

The treasurer of the building fund cheerily
remarked to the class-leader that the last
chapel-tea realised one pound seven and
threepence ha’penny towards clearing off
the debt of four hundred pounds on that

edifice. Two others discussed the right of a somewhat officious young man to attend the business-committee of the Wesley Guild.

Nothing but her affection for Edmund prevented Miss Grainger from joining this duo; but as her voice, faintly coquettish, sounded in his ears, he heard under it with painful distinctness the coward in him hope—O with what wicked vehemence!—that the woman about to be saved might not, after all, be his fellow-adventurer. It would be so inconvenient if she were saved, before or after that eruption of self-consciousness which is called confession, so very inconvenient!

He was clever enough to lash himself with sarcasm, and at the same time attend to Miss Grainger. "I will have her for a partisan," he thought; then, "she is not worth it;" then, "she is worth a dozen of me;" then, "she is intolerable;" then, "she shall cure me of thinking."

There is a way, between the hills and a

hedge, near that chapel, and it leads to the sea.

Edmund walked with his companion along this way. Suddenly, he begged that she would halt a moment.

They halted, and, forgetting her by sheer force of will, he gazed at the hills that lay as though carved into everlasting rest under the threat of doom. Calm and mute, and tremendous they lay, under the celestial fields of paling primrose that the scattered bushes of sepia clouds separated from the luminous blue of the larger heaven. The moon was fully possessed of the glory she wins from the sun. The canopy over her appalled her not, and him it could not delude. "I see but rain in the worst," he mused: "I scent afar the sweetness of refreshed thirst in flower and weed alike." The bat that struck aslant him to the inner side of the hedge felt no more, no less, he truly believed. Anon, the moon was hidden, but there was a smile of light all round her. "God rest them that

fear for souls," thought Edmund. "My soul! Were I not at harmony even with the insects, I would say: 'What irony is this!'—I, who see but rain in the worst."

Then he remembered his guilt and stamped his foot on the ground.

The girl had seen nothing, but she laughed at the stamp of the foot. "Why, you are quite a savage!" she said.

"I would I were," he retorted.

She laughed again—a gurgling, indefinite, giggling sort of laugh which irritated him.

"To you," he remarked, walking the while at a swinging pace, "to you it would seem monstrous, I suppose, to live like a woad-painted Briton amid these hills and hollows. You are right; every kind of liar—land-owner and land-protector—would rise up to hector you. And special journeys would be made to see a man as he is and bully him for it."

She found him as unintelligible to-day when he was ironical as she had found him yester-

day when he was sentimental and talked of asphodels.

She laughed, stopped, laughed again, then giggled, and giggled, and giggled.

He said nothing ; but, between laugh and giggle, she occasionally said : " Excuse me, but I can't help it," and he begged her not to mention it.

For her part, she was quite happy, and liked being with him whether she understood him or not.

She only wanted to feel his personality—the pulse of a strong life. That she was to have correspondences to him in herself never entered her simple head. " I'm not clever," she would have said, " but I love him."

She was egoist enough to think that that said all that was to be said. She was pleased with herself for having indulged him in his mood of meditation, bored though she had been. She promised herself that she would always indulge him in such harmless freaks

of abstraction; "and he shall talk as much as he likes." She did not, however, trouble to inquire if she could stimulate or change his moods by moods of her own.

Essentially, she could not. She was intellectually empty, and, deriving colossal satisfaction from the mere aspect of him as she saw it, she had neither the will nor the power to study him more.

They parted in an interval between a laugh and a wave of the hand.

"Good-bye," he said. "I shall be glad to remember that laugh when I have left this place."

"I never heard of that," she said.

"You had food enough for your laughter," he replied.

"We never walked to the sea," thought Edmund, afterwards, "and with her I never would—except as an experiment."

The Great Lie grew in worth and importance against her frivolity.

When he reached home, indeed, he was

quite ready for his supper, and, as his father was asleep, Mrs Weaverling prepared it without the tragic haste which kills appetite. So Edmund lounged back in his chair, and, while his cocoa was being stirred, put his hand into his pocket mechanically and drew forth the dolly-grass. He looked at it stupidly for a moment. That innocent plant had been, if he had known, a dearer keepsake than the ineffaceable stamp of greedy lips. But he could not remember the one without the other; and as the miserable incongruities of that parti-coloured yesterday dismayed his inward vision, he lingered over the thought that the euphemism of "godlike" does not sufficiently conceal the odium of the cad.

At this moment, Mrs Weaverling, cup in hand, espied the dolly-grass as it lay droopingly on the table.

"Who brought that in?" she cried indignantly. "Did you?"

"I did," said Edmund.

“Well, you ought to have known better,” cried the agitated woman as she snatched up the blades and threw them on the fire. “You ought to know better than to bring the bad luck into the house.”

Edmund sat still, pondering the irony of his position. To him, the mischief-maker, the *fons et origo mali*, she ministered; the absolutely harmless weeds she destroyed. And in attributing to them, in the light of an ugly superstition, the influence of sophisticated sinners, she betrayed that demoniac quality of mind which creates the thing it dreads.

“To think,” mused Edmund, in an agony of contempt, “that I was born beneath a horseshoe, of a woman who never walked under a ladder, and though she cannot forget the result of these precautions, she still believes in the Devil and dolly-grass. And yet there are people who persist in declaring that religion is not instinctive in the human breast!”

Then a great pity for his mother welled into his heart and into his eyes, and he said "good-night" to her so gently as to consume her with self-reproach.

CHAPTER IX

ANXIETY for his father decreased with the morning's report of an improvement in his condition, but Edmund's fear of the woman about to be saved increased sevenfold. His nerves shook at the prospect of an attack on his own soul, under the heading of an attempt to rescue it. Indeed, he felt positively ill with trepidation when, in the course of Wednesday morning, he found himself arrested in the neighbourhood of the *Bon Marché*.

"Going down to row, my man?"

Edmund assented.

"Hard work this weather."

Edmund assented.

"Are you open to take up another job?"

Edmund's interlocutor turned out to be of

that consummate, if not illustrious, species of diplomatist termed shopwalker.

“I don’t mean work, but I do mean pay,” he proceeded gently, leading the way to a private bar. “The fact is,” he resumed, when the presence of two half-quaffed glasses of beer betokened the existence of confidential relations between them, “the fact is that our window-dresser was arranging our waxen bicyclist the other day when he caught sight of you. ‘The very man for an ad.,’ he sang out. Guv’nor hears him, and told me to keep my eye open for you. Thirty bob a week, and all you’ve got to do is to ride that bike, and show by the way that it don’t spoil the chest of a man. It won’t carry you a step. All you’ve got to do is to work the pedals.”

“Anything more?”

The shopwalker clapped him on the shoulder. “Just this, which you can’t help: look as devilishly like that young napper-dandy of a poet that the women rave over as you do

this moment. . . . You don't know who I mean? Well, he'd have been one of our best customers—if he'd only paid up. If we have you in our window, dressed like a gentleman, you'll puzzle the whole town."

The sunlight flashed down a tottering stone staircase into the street and across the floor of the public-house. Horribly real looked the marks and splotches of alcohol and expectoration thereupon, and dismally unexhilarating the motionless amber of the half-quaffed beer.

It tasted to Edmund as though it were vile, or he were vile to condescend to it. The coarse conviviality of the tap-room, lacking the illusion of gassy splendour, ransacked and laid bare by its enemy the sun, oppressed him with a leaden weight of tragedy.

"Call it a fairy-tale," he thought to himself. "Three ingredients fill that goblet, Mirth, Stupor, Headache. If I drink to be merry, I am deaf to the music of which I was moulded; if I drink to be stupid—"

"You will have another?"

The shopwalker was speaking blandly.

"You have answered my question," said Edmund.

"What question?"

"That if I drink to be stupid, I shall have another."

"I only ask you to quench your thirst. . . . Well, as to my firm's offer—thirty bob a week—have you made up your mind? Yes or No?"

"If I said Yes, I should have another and another and another . . ."

"Well?"

"I won't."

"I wish you had said so earlier," grumbled the shopwalker, wiping his moustache.

"I almost wish I had said so a week ago," replied Edmund.

"I have no time for fooling," said the shopwalker, and he passed stiffly out of the shop. His fine square forehead was full of haberdashery—he was a statesman in his own

way ; and his mouth was curved to the flickering smile of the persistent courtier of commerce.

“The fellow is a fool,” he reflected, “handsome by accident ; what’s the use of such an accident?”

Edmund dallied a moment that he might be cleanly rid of him, and then followed. Outside, leaning against the wall, was a red-faced man with a tuft of reddish beard at his chin’s tip. Edmund felt impelled to speak to him in response to something half-shy but appealing in the man’s attitude.

“You want a drink?” he inquired.

“Thank’ee, I could do with a drop,” said the man. “Excuse me being slow, I’m blind.” The fishy pulps in the small orbits fringed with sandy hair told as much.

The man drank his beer eagerly, but betrayed a sense that a doubt of his sincerity lurked in the easy complacency of Edmund’s patronage. He pulled his eye-sockets sideways to enhance their lack of visual meaning,

and was hideous where he had been pitiable.

"You see I am quite blind," he said.

"But I am not," said Edmund ruefully. He extended his hand and grasped the limp one that was not ready.

"Gawd bless you!" exclaimed the mendicant, in a burst of good-fellowship.

"It is nothing," said Edmund. "You should drink like a fish: it is your due."

He left the mendicant hopefully waiting for another drink. He lashed himself with the thought: "the pleasure of the man without eyes is my pleasure. What is it that I have loved in myself all along? what have I cherished? It is the glutton and not the god."

It was consoling to think, however, that the godlike things, independent of man's gluttony, were near him, up these crooked steps, past those bureaus of pinchbeck souvenirs for returning visitors, or rattling pianos for staying ones, to the bourne where "naught of man endures before the sun,"

unless it be a switchback, that emblem of futility.

Somehow the world was growing a less beautiful place in his eyes—probably in order to account for his Jack Horner-like preference for corners in which to consume fruit of dubious quality—and he found himself increasingly liable to wind up sentences, that promised much in poetic sentiment, with an ill-assorting tag of ridicule.

He wanted to defeat some of the poetic sentiments of the world—O how badly, now and then!—this about “being saved,” for instance. “A fool’s consciousness of his own vitality,” was the meaning of the process the artist had said. But then, wasn’t being damned just the same thing? Well, why not? It only proved that death in life was mere respectability. It made one cheerful to know that; at least it was calculated to make one cheerful.

“I am in a fix, anyhow,” decided Edmund, as he walked up and down the promenade,

affectionately glancing at the sea the while—the sea that impassively committed all the crimes and displayed all the graces—"I am in a fix; because I am a creature of habit. My bump of veneration is too large, or too small. I must respect myself. How do my namesake's lines go?—

‘If I am shameless as a venomed weed,
Yet crave the sunlight and inhale the air,
And if, while here I am, the lily's there,
Who dare oppose my claim—although my seed
Be hidden yet, unwaking, unaware?
The eternal evil fixed and combative,
The good that hates it and is touched with fire,
Are seen by God to make the clod, the mire,
Subtle to breed the force whereby they live,
And win His smile by doubling His desire.
All sins of pride that in their darkness bleed,
All limping virtues, that cry *Ichabod!*
Love, in the lily, or the shameless weed,
God That is good and Evil that is God.’”

The thoughts tossing about in his mind unfitted him for the promenade, and he walked madly into the thicket of ill-set streets where the tumbledown houses looked saucily through

bleared eyes at their neighbours across the way.

"Don't tell me," muttered Edmund, "that saving goes on here. Damme, there's the house! What shall come out of it?"

He had the courage to stand still as though it might speak to him. The evangelist answered his question by emerging from it.

"Good-day," said Edmund.

"You have come, then," remarked Mr Lyminge, and Edmund saw a lowering stillness of angry mental night on the face levelled at his. In view of an impending torrent of words he felt half-afraid, though a naked Hercules might have found no fear in him.

"You have something to say," he said.

"Is this the place?"

"If you can clear yourself, why not?"

"If I can't—?"

"Any place where you can drop upon your knees."

A gaze from an upper window was felt by both.

“What are you making of that woman?”

“What have you made?”

But Edmund had seen her face, and not the inquisition of the crowd, or the intuition of the evangelist, could stay the blood in his veins that ran for victory of the animal in him as though his soul were afloat upon it. All the precedent hated humbug of his compact eternity of life, lived and regretted, lent poignancy to the despair which squeezed the answer out of his lips.

“Damn you!” he muttered; “you have made her a prying saint!”

She imaged to him in burlesque the figure he had presented to heaven and earth when he assumed the attitude of prayer, while he had nothing worthy to pray for, when, in fact, he did not dare to whisper, “lead us not into temptation,” for fear he should be withdrawn from the delights of a conscious fall. He turned hot and cold with

remembrance of the mere sensuous gratification he had sought and obtained in religious revival, for it seemed to him that the sin against the Holy Ghost could be nothing else than this.

"Yes, I said 'damn you,'" he repeated, the more defiantly because he felt unstrung, and the loafers of the street applauded him.

"You condemn yourself," said the evangelist.

"Then I have saved you some trouble," remarked Edmund.

"We are at cross purposes," said the evangelist. "It may be worth while to talk reasonably, quietly."

"Where then?" asked Edmund.

"My house," said the evangelist.

And so it was at the former's house that the man of God and the chameleon-man agreed to hold conference.

Edmund wondered faintly why he walked by this man's side. Why did he not run away into the broader world? The answer

was simple enough. His interests were here centred : he was too lazy to go and seek fresh ones. To amaze the people that had known the old Edmund with the glories and whimsies of the new Edmund, to set his present stature against that of men and youths who had overborne him, to delight women's eyes that had never glanced his way save in reluctant compassion, to confuse minds that had set his in the midst of a darkness of dogma—this was what he had thought to do, this was what he was doing. And the imagination that creates beings, which, having cognizance of only two dimensions, restrict their movements accordingly, finds Edmund faithful to a mental law in a stubborn adherence to his old environment or envelope.

The door of the evangelist's house was not shut, as though to connect the interior with the fragrance of a garden-plot enamelled with Virginia stocks. They did not go into the parlour with its glistening over-mantel of machine-made symmetry, its gorgeous photo-

graph-frames, its hard and airless landscapes and its subsidiary wall-growth of rosettes and furbelows and chair-growth of antimacassars and shawls; but they went upstairs to a little room that was the evangelist's study, where were a few good books set in a cool expanse of shelves, a writing-table and two chairs.

The evangelist shut the door, and the two were alone.

"In the first place," said the evangelist, "permit me to tell you what I saw and heard when I was summoned from the band-meeting last Tuesday evening. The girl Alice, who lodges over the brush shop, had felt ill, and sent down word by the servant Kate to the landlady. The landlady retorted, 'I thought it would come to this,' but she went upstairs notwithstanding. Alice said she had such a pain in her side that she was afraid she was dying. The landlady said, 'I would have told you so when I saw that ghost.' 'What ghost?' asked Alice. And

then it appeared that the Mr Edmund who went down in the *Hardcastle*—went down certainly and irrevocably as a sightless stone—was a frequent visitor of this house. And you, sir, are as like that dead man, as two eyes in the same head. Alice had known the dead man (the dreary story does not bear telling); but he had drifted away—I suppose when he became a lover before the world of one better than she. Such was the revelation made to me, coupled with the bare-faced falsehood—founded on the ugly superstition, which is all of religion a corrupted spirit has the power to bestow—that you, sir, are the ghost of your wicked predecessor in good looks, and that you were on Monday night the Devil's ambassador summoning her to Hell. Poor woman, she fed the horror thus laid upon her till her cries for the Father's mercy effected an entrance even into that house, for me His servant. And now sir, she is saved; and your hypocrisies are over. Thank God, thank God!"

"I would leave you to thank Him," said Edmund, rising; "but I wish to ask this: Did you tell her anything?"

"I vouched for your flesh and blood. I could say nothing more."

"How did she take it?"

"She was unconvinced. Indeed," proceeded the evangelist with mild severity, "you did your best to confuse her. But," he continued with some hesitation, "there was another reason for her retaining the idea that you were a spirit. For, man, your predecessor seems, after his sort, to have loved her. At any rate, when he decided to marry that heiress, whom God has spared from finding him out, his paramount wish was to provide for this woman. At least, it was a wish only second to his wish to provide for himself. He gave her, just before your arrival at this town, enough money to lay the foundation of an honest livelihood, had she been disposed to spend it prudently. On the whole, I sympathise with her for wasting it. She

could not have wanted that kind of remembrance of him. And she had his own vain words spoken at parting, which are something more than vain to her now. He said that when he was dead his 'convenient marriage' would be void; that he would forget everything but his love for her; his fear that she should suffer harm. 'I will come back at the last,' he said. That was a sort of peroration to a former speech about never deserting her. It ill becomes one to judge the dead, but I should be inclined to call that man, living and dead, a great lie."

"I think," said Edmund in a low tone, "that he kept his word with uncommon ingenuity. But I must not detain you. I, at any rate, am a great lie, and have my work to do. Good-day."

"Stop!" cried the evangelist imperiously. "Is there no lesson for you, think you, in all this? I do not believe that you are other than flesh and blood, but can you say that you are truly alive? Answer the question

between yourself and your Maker: *Do you live?* Does it need my tongue to tell you that the beauty and the wisdom that have disgraced themselves, under the spur of whatever passion, are a mask upon corruption? Tear it aside yourself and hate yourself; if the world should withdraw it, you would but cherish the plague-spot it would reveal."

"I do not propose to commit suicide," said Edmund.

"We have different conceptions about taking life," said the evangelist.

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes. It would take my life to grow dumb under the strain of incessant lying, and deaf by continual suppression of the still small voice, and blind by excluding God and man from the notice of my eyes. Is that enough? Ah! I should starve if I put aside the gift of Jesus Christ which is eternal life, and stood alone."

"There are others."

"The supreme art of self is to stand above

others at an immeasurable height, and forget the humanity owed to them, in order to accept with serenity their extremest service. And, therefore, the selfish man is alone, and he dies as much of his mental gluttony for praise as of his physical gluttony for flesh. He who lives in the common life may live; but he who lives by the common life shall die."

"There are plenty of men like me even on that reckoning," said Edmund.

"Doubtless. The gigantic self is prevalent, but each monster of the kind sees all other men as pigmies. But not for such subtleties did I bring you here, but to plead with you. God is patient under folly and insincerity; but do not sin against the Holy Ghost. You know the truth; receive it. Start afresh. I have whispered no word of this, your sin, to the world—why should I? Disclose yourself to yourself, and put on the beauty of Christ by accepting the sacrifice of His Blood."

"You are kind," said Edmund feebly. "You are kind; but you are too good to understand."

"I do understand," said the evangelist passionately. "I have been through it all, and emerged. Why? Because I found that there was no self-satisfaction but 'to be nothing, nothing' in one's self, and all to men, by a continual flowing out of self in the stream of brotherly love, which girdles the universe. In that nothingness there is life eternal; not as a reward, but as a result. But, ere I knew that nothingness, I debased myself at the bidding of a hungry nerve, even as you have, sir. Where the nerve led me, there I followed; in my self-brokenness, in my imbecility of hunger, I was bound for the nothingness which is death. But now the healing hand of Jesus has touched me, and I am free of wandering desires. I am free by Him — by Him alone."

"I must be going," said Edmund.

“One moment,” said the evangelist; “will you try to give yourself to Him?”

Edmund gazed at him solemnly. The white face, with the large eager eyes of grey, that met his subtle green ones steadily (with wonder), yet tenderly (with pity), was still a young face, but a face as radiant as the winter-face of a poet in whom is the soul of a nation. “He is a man,” thought Edmund, “who has gained all he asked—the victory of himself.” Down in the garden was the sound of a child’s feet; against the outer wall was the patter of a ball. “He has a child,” thought Edmund, “a child whom he can look at with joy, because he has given it nothing evil for an inheritance. And I—I dare not picture myself a father; and I dare not picture myself a lonely man. How this man’s life affronts me!” His eye roved the wall, and there, in an odd scroll-work of assorted types, he saw the Lord’s Prayer, headed with a picture of the Christ. “The man has a gigantic simplicity,” thought

Edmund; "he is a child at heart. How confidently he looks at me while I rear myself out of my bottomless pit to stand on his study-floor! In front is his little show-garden; behind are his vegetables. He has a parlour full of the showy rubbish that pleases the elect. Here he has me, and he wants me; ah! how badly he wants me! There is nothing worth seeing in the back, front, or parlour, without me! He does not understand or accept the incompleteness of life. He is not for saying, 'God That is good, and evil that is God,' like my quaint predecessor. He believes in the great war between the Omnipotent Creator and His creatures. And the *casus belli*? That there may be fun in heaven, one must suppose. But does he? Not a bit of it. He prates of free-will. Am I willing to be condemned? No! certainly not. How he stares at me! Will I capitulate when I see the executioner? Of course I will; but I must have some information about the law of the land."

"Well, brother?" said the evangelist quietly.

Edmund shivered slightly, and stumbled over words. "I have thought it over," he murmured. "You are right. I am wrong. When next I go to chapel it shall be to give myself to the Lord."

"Shall we pray together, brother?" said the evangelist gently and gladly.

"Not now," said Edmund faintly. "This thing is for silence"

He withdrew hurriedly, not unmoved, and half ashamed. "It is not a great lie, this time," he reflected for such comfort as it might bring; "it is only a little white one."

But, underlying his amazing effrontery of argument, was the disturbing thought that the evangelist's surroundings were merely accidental to him; that his absence of art-sense was atoned for by a perfection of soul-sense, whereby matter was not a subject worthy of man's sensitiveness. In the tremendous question of man's relationship to his Maker, the minor question of the harmonious

distribution of wool, and crochet, and paint, was not, and never would be, suggested. Let it be granted that he would always be a child in this world, and his pleasure in mere vivid colouring would remain as the savages'. Still, his power of self-sacrifice would defeat his critics to the end. Where their cowardice retreated, he set his lips and advanced. He, before whose eyes the smoke of Hell dispersed as a mountain mist before the morning, had the power of beauty if not the sense of art. "Then," quoth Edmund internally, to uplift and confirm the white lie once and for all, "what is the use of speech if it is not to allay anger, and lull suspicion, and maintain peace? Truth is the one unpardonable impertinence in a world of imperfection."

After his abrupt departure, and as the clock struck five, the evangelist's daughter reminded him that tea was ready.

But the evangelist was praying for Edmund. He did not come down to his tea for

another half-hour ; and then his incensed wife scolded him to his weary, shining face.

When Edmund reached his home, he found Mrs Gotch in cheerful ascendancy at the tea-table ; Miss Grainger was also there. He saluted them both scrupulously.

Mrs Weaverling was full of a reporter, who had called on her and announced his sympathy in very impressive tones. He had not seen her husband, but his Muse had held converse with the fisherman, as the next number of the *Scout* duly testified :

“ ’Twas for the best, brave mariner,
He was a crippled lad ;”
Quoth Weaverling, “ Bethink ye, sir,
My best was all I had.”

During the meal, Edmund could not but observe a something peculiarly polite in Mrs Gotch’s bearing towards him, which indicated in that pious and malignant person a sense of holding a trump-card, and brooding over it. If he handed her the water-cress, she thanked him in a severe way ; if he did not

address her personally, she seemed to wait patiently for the removal of an intrusive obstacle, or else, to compose her broad face into an expression of absolute indifference.

"I have just seen Mr Lyminge," he remarked easily.

Both his mother and Miss Grainger looked relieved.

"But," remarked Mrs Gotch, "poor Mr Lyminge has to see everybody."

"That comes well from one who makes it her business to see ghosts," said Edmund.

"I believe what I'm told, unless I hear to the contrary," retorted Mrs Gotch, with a significant glance at his face. "It ain't 'ard to believe in ghosts after seein' that poor Mr Ryan."

"You have not, I hope, been the recipient of any further convictions?" asked Edmund.

"I am always open—" began Mrs Gotch.

"Like that useful vehicle the omnibus," said Edmund, "and some of your ideas alight because it isn't a penny all the way, and some are joggled to death."

"I could shut you up double-quick if I liked," said Mrs Gotch "if it wasn't for these ladies."

"And still be open to receive?—O Mrs Gotch! The sweet son mus'n't hear of this!"

Miss Grainger buttoned her gloves.

Exasperated beyond endurance, Mrs Gotch exclaimed: "He ain't fit to speak to; there!"

Miss Grainger glanced at Edmund. "Shall we walk a little?" she inquired.

In the depths of himself he almost loved her at that moment.

"The suspect is at your service," he said.

Mrs Gotch cast the girl's father in her teeth. "I dunno wot 'e'd say," she remarked to Mrs Weaverling, "'im that was like to disown her for wantin' to go to the the-ayter."

As for Miss Grainger, she had not heard the awful disclosures which Mrs Gotch was pouring into Mrs Weaverling's reluctant ear. She began, therefore, ^{by} ~~on~~ insisting on her

personal dislike for Mrs Gotch. It seemed to her a favourable opportunity for cultivating love's shy flower in his sense of her loyalty. It was not hard to believe him honourable, for his beauty scorned detraction.

Edmund seemed greatly diverted. "You must excuse her, Miss Grainger," he said. "She is cast in the divine image of Mrs Grundy; and did you mark how she, being

'Wroth to see [Her] kingdom fail,
Swings the scaly horror of her folded tail'?"

"How you do run on, to be sure!" she exclaimed.

And under the numbing influence of his little white lie in the evangelist's study, Edmund strolled on with her, regardless of his power as a suspect, let alone a convict, to compromise her in the eyes of the chapel-folk.

"I was afraid you was angry with me," she said.

"Angry!" he exclaimed blankly. "Why on earth?——"

"I thought you might be: that's all."

"But why?"

"Because I laughed so much last time. But, really, I couldn't help it."

"Pooh, pooh!" said Edmund—"a baby's rattle!"

"Now you're rude."

"Then there was a joke, eh? I'm sorry I missed it."

He found it simply wonderful; how utterly remote she was from him as a feminine personality. He himself, emptied of noble sentiment and cynical under the lash of Nemesis, was guilty of reflecting that he might receive from innumerable women all that she had to give.

Not entirely unconscious of her own magnanimity, the girl tried to interest him by confidently admitting her own exclusiveness. She did not make friends with everyone; she could not talk with backbiters or liars.

“O dear, O dear!” sighed Edmund.

“Those three Miss Tomlinsons I can’t stand,” she said. “Giggling in chapel! I don’t think they ought to come. Come or don’t come, I say; but behave if you do.”

“I shall never come again,” he said.

“Are you going so soon?” she cried, almost in terror.

“I have given up chapels,” he said.

“Oh, now, I hope you aren’t thinking of that nasty Mr Brewster,” she said. “He’s silly, I think. Father says he drinks.”

“No,” he said. “There are deeper reasons.”

“But why? You are a Christian, are you not?”

“I am ‘all things to all men,’ as St Paul says,” he replied.

They walked seaward in silence for a time. Then the girl drew her court around her, as it were, and tried to raise her value in his eyes, by allusion to the ardour of her

undeniable admirers; some of them true and worthy.

"I apologise to all these pleasant gentlemen for escorting you," said Edmund.

"I could not wish for a more affable companion," she replied.

"Affable!" His gorge rose against the word; it made him feel greasy and Grandisonian, though he had certainly never known Richardson's gentleman a week ago.

"Your wishes shall be surpassed by their fulfilment," he said.

And now she tripped in front of him to the clayey bank before the rock-strewn beach, and would go no further.

"I made terms with the sea long ago," he said.

Then he gazed outward, and his heart stood still, and leapt.

There at the sea's verge, pulling at the sharp rocks with nervous hands, was Mrs Weaverling.

"Mother!" he cried.

She turned round with wild eyes : " Eddy, Eddy ! "

He ran breathless to her side.

" I meant ' Mrs Weaverling, ' " he exclaimed, and the words burned his throat. " O Mrs Weaverling, can you not see it is no use ? "

" Oh, you are crool ! " she cried. " Why did you speak like him ? Where do you come from ? "

" Come home, " he said, " I cannot give you back your son. "

He held her arm.

" Don't touch me, " she cried.

He let her return alone, but he did not re-join the dryshod girl whose sense of propriety held her aloft. Formidable enough was that as a barrier between them—more formidable than the visible barrier of rocks ; but the agony of the Great Lie straining and parting in his breast was the incommunicable voice shouting No ! in her ears. Though she could not hear it, she could feel it.

Out of the craving to be absorbed by him,

as we are absorbed by the impending sky whose glance creates whatever of loveliness we possess, a reality was born to her. It was her woman's soul.

And he?

The grey reality of pain, the boding of evil to come in his mother's face, the self-sacrifice of hurried days and wakeful nights sharpening those strong features still dear to him—in the presence of these the Great Liar went through all the contortions of self-discovery and self-disgrace. He was Brewster on the mental plane.

On that ominous night unconsecrated by prayer, he dreamed the most frightful dream of his life. He dreamed that it was impossible to be alone, to be still and be at ease. There, as he lay facing the door, the blank darkness became hostile and a voice cried: "I last. I last, who do not blame you, but have made you my eternal mark because you are utterly alone. I last, who see you as you will be in the wilderness of shadows, in the teeth of the

wordless wind in the hollow that has no earth beneath or sky above."

This voice was near enough to terrify him ; far enough away to be strange as death is. It was loud enough to intensify the choking silence that hung about him ; it was low enough to seem more stealthy than the creaking footstep of a robber upon the stair. Fear maddened him, and he lurched on his bed that he might hear the jangling of its iron frame, and then it was as if the bed had become a wild beast that tore about the room.

Water running from a tap turned by his mother broke the spell ; but, ah ! he had learned that he was afraid to be by himself. He cowered in the open hell of liars, able only to do evil, the music of forfeited desire fading into inarticulate nonsense as it played itself out in his brain.

CHAPTER X

WHEN he awoke, with the stertorous breathing of his father startling his ears, and the sense that his reputation was transfixed by the tongue of Mrs Gotch oppressing his mind, he was in no mood to encounter the blistering sultry day that the early mists presaged.

He found the artist in a tranquil state of clairvoyance, humanised by a slight heaviness, not to be called headache.

"I can see better than I can paint to-day," he remarked cheerfully.

"What is the use of that?" inquired Edmund.

"Use be damned! There is clearly more enjoyment. Yet there is a use, too."

"Name it," said Edmund dully.

"The better I see the more I know how to leave out."

Edmund withdrew his eyes from the

artist: to him the room was swimming; the little white lie of yesterday was making him feel giddy.

“What is the matter with you?” inquired the artist.

“O Christ! it is one of the things you have left out!”

Perhaps the obtrusion of the Methodistical Edmund-the-Ugly on the Parnassian Edmund-the-Beautiful quickened the artist; or perhaps the anguish of his model's voice struck a vibrant chord of his heart: be that as it may, his hortatory words seemed to Edmund horridly noisy as thunder, fearfully vivid as lightning.

“Sir,”—there was a crash to the weary listener—“when I see a man perfectly from head to heel”—there was a flash—“and all the show of him is beautiful, I pay him the homage of imitation; I try to reproduce that beauty. I am glad—I am proud. But when I see that the man is not glad, that he is, on the contrary, miserable, that he is not

proud, but, on the contrary, ashamed, then I know that the mind of the man disowns—not to say repudiates—that beauty, by hostility to its peace in the perturbation of private guilt, in the pondering of unjust relation to it which makes that mind as one who has forced the Gate of Paradise, whose garment is stolen—stolen, sir!”—crash followed flash and Edmund shut his eyes, and would fain have stopped his ears, but the terrible voice boomed on into them unhindered— “And there I halt, sir. It is not my artist’s wish to reproduce that poisoned and poisonous mind behind the beauty, whose aspect I enjoy in common with the most superficial observer in the street. Poor Beauty is insulted enough in this our world. But I owe you as a man (and a model!) so much of advice. If you are not on good terms with your beauty, if, to resume my somewhat odd simile, you have, in fact, stolen it”—again the flash—“there is a majority that will not disapprove of a theft so noble if you lend

colour to it yourself. Frankly, I expect some joyous swagger on your part, if thief you be. I expect you to live up to the old ideal that made you so nimble! I resent seeing you turn grey."

When he had finished, Edmund, coldly conscious of returning power, snapped out the first retaliatory speech that occurred to him. "It is you who're the thief!"

"For unlocking your cupboard, you would say? But patience, *mon ami*, I restore you the key."

"Blackguard!" murmured Edmund.

"'Sh!" said the artist, finger on lip, "how can I paint?"

Edmund smiled in spite of himself.

When the sitting terminated, the artist, as was usual with him, courteously walked to the folding doors, and opened the one at his left hand.

He stood still, holding the handle with his disengaged hand, while he proffered his right to Edmund.

As the two faced one another, the lethargic misery, which eclipsed the youthful freshness of his model, inspired him with pity. Unfortunately it turned somewhat acid in the process of translation.

“Here’s vulgar advice to you,” he began abruptly. “In plain, unpoetical words, *buck up!* You’ll not be damned for making the most of what you’ve got. Make the most of it, then! You’ve a voice which any impressario would speculate in, for you have the making of an all-conquering tenor. You might become a Crœsus in eighteen months; and economy would then be more mad than farcical. But that is the poor part of the entertainment, festive as it sounds. ‘Sweets to the sweet.’ You will find that the world was never so full of fair ladies. And all willing to be yours! They will not think of your mind, I promise you. You are no ascetic, but you want to avoid the appearance of gaining greatly by undeserved advantages. My friend, there is the tale of a man now

turned into stone because he ate mutton-suet from the hands of the elves—a man, remember, who rose above the temptations that princely Satan provides. The low pig! it was well he became a stone pig, though a less enduring statue to his memory were to be preferred! Don't follow his example. Let your sin be splendid, not sordid. As green-bay tree, the wicked man is prosperous and delightful; as mere thistle, he is the mark of every bumpkin's stick. In other words, in the world we live in, the man of taste has infinite credit, the man of indiscriminating impulse, none. Not without praise is he who succumbs to the dazzling bribe; despicable is he who is caught playing 'beggar my neighbour' with the humble and meek. That is why one man is 'profligate,' and another is 'obscene.' You have a pretty talent; don't squander it on prostitutes and parsons. The humiliation produced by consorting with the one, leads quite fatally to absolute obfuscation, at the instance of the other."

The artist rolled all this out in a leisurely way, between a shrug and a sneer. He misread the calmness of his listener.

"Have you quite finished?" asked the latter with inhuman politeness.

"I think so. Yes, you have my philosophy in a nutshell."

"Then you shall have mine in a similar form," said Edmund, and he hit out sideways with his right hand with all the force he could muster.

The artist avoided the blow with scarcely an effort, and its weight fell on the edge of the door, causing Edmund a moment of exquisite pain.

"On the whole, my philosophy wins," said the artist, but Edmund left him without another word, and with a firm intention not to speak to him again, even to receive the modicum of salary which fell due.

His head was aching, and his hat was an unendurable weight till, on taking it off, it seemed as if all the flagrant sunlight lay

upon him. Added to that was the unfortunate wrist, bruised to the bone, which reminded him of his pugilistic failure. Why, he asked himself, had he struck the blow? Himself replied that it was less because he was insulted and enraged than because he desired to prove his own reality, *i.e.* solidity in the flesh. The consequence had been merely to set the stamp of human frailty upon the limb that might have passed for godlike. Then, it seemed to him that there had been a suspension of brain-life in him during the space of two hours. He had lost the logic of lying, and adopted a kind of piteous honesty which the Recording Angel might be conceived to ponder a moment over, pen in hand, ere writing it down as half-a-lie. He had certainly arrived at this conclusion that, so long as he did things with any consciousness of their future effect upon him he was untruthful in a subtle way. He could not resist the thought that he might pause, here or there, in the grand marauding expedi-

tion of life, merely that he might say to himself, "I drew the line at one thing; I couldn't stand that, at anyrate."

He was roused from this introspection by hearing the voices of the inseparable Gotch-one and Hallaway, who had just come out of school.

"Mar," said Gotch-one, alluding imperfectly to his domestic goddess of war, "says she'll 'av him took up if he touches us."

"Keep it dark," said Hallaway, "but I know a thing or two." His subsequent remarks showed that he had peered into Edmund's dust-bin of hard fact with no little sagacity.

Neither of the pair mentioned his name. By an ingenious curvature, Edmund put himself abreast of them.

"Well met, boys!"

They said nothing.

"I am pleased to see you together," said Edmund. "You were born to extinguish one another: that's the only excuse for there

being two of you. Nature is perverse, but she repents."

His hand lay heavily on Hallaway's shoulder.

"Talking scandal, eh, Hallaway?"

"No, we ain't," said that youth, with a perceptible snarl.

"Do you believe him, Gotch?"

"Of course I do."

"Does Hallaway believe Hallaway?"

"Yes, he does, Clever, so there!" sneered Hallaway.

"Confiding boy—this is indeed faith!"

"Is that all?" said Hallaway.

"Well, I had thought of giving you both a thrashing, but Hallaway's loyalty to himself shall not be in vain. But take care. The boys that stoned Edmund Weaverling on the day he died—O and many times before! (not to speak of the Guy Fawkes' Day baiting) [an old and horrible grotesque which made them redden]—are not fit to decry their neighbours. Hold your tongues, little murderers; if you had been talking of Jack Ketch him-

self, you would have made an honest man eager to chastise you. You to talk—you, you! Bah, you're found out, both of you! Can't you manage a little shame?"

Hallaway turned round squarely at this: "It's all tommy-rot," he said, "and you've no right to call me a murderer, nor Gotch neither."

It was only now that Edmund realised that he was making a fool of himself, for the benefit of a baker's boy and two habitual surveyors of mankind from the chalked curb-stone of the *Jolly Sailor*.

Why should he put these imps through their paces? He was paying too dearly for matter to soothe his wounded pride. The prophet stood no better with posterity for being vindicated by bears when the ribalds cried: "Go up, thou bald head." And he, Edmund, was no prophet, merely a sinner rashly vindictive, and thereby a wanton partisan of the memory which he loathed. Why, he hugged the past! The idea struck him

like a flash of lightning: then vanished. It was still, in his estimation, necessary to have the best of these boys. So he found a catapult on Hallaway, and threw it on the roof of a house, and a bird, not quite dead, in Gotch's pocket, whose neck he wrung. With their hatred quivering impotently in his wake, he strode away.

He wanted something to cheer him up, and he was agreeably reminded by this want that his clothes were now ready at the tailor's. He called for them and with all speed went home to emancipate himself.

For that, indeed, was his thought as, after momentary conference with the departing doctor, he sat in his little bedroom—his cabin at home—and drew off the old and put on the new. He seemed insulated against the atmosphere of rumour and disrepute that he might flash forth authentic messages from the current of his self-esteem. Like Teufelsdröckh unto the Four-and-Twenty Tailors, he asked of, or exclaimed to, his Sartor: "How

many other unholies has your covering art made holy!" Being holy after the fashion of Sartor, he had done with parochial life and the pleasures, taken gingerly, which make a hubbub of its centre. He would sojourn in the heart of the world—some great city—where the word prejudice spells damnation for the person holding it. Nay, he would travel and abandon the thought of centrality which is the cant of the free. Why had he not thought of all this before? Well, the idea had come to him in little more than a week of his new manhood: he had not lost much time.

The doctor had just told him that all danger was over, so he tapped cheerily at his father's door, and entered.

"Well, how are you, Mr Weaverling?" he said, meaning: "I know you are better, and am glad of it."

"Hunc, here's transmogrifying!" was the gruff comment. "Does all this come of settin'?"

“‘The god Apple’ had no use for them so he gave them to me,” said Edmund.

Inwardly, the fisherman raged. “Hunc,” he muttered, “I guess I can weather it now, first as last.”

In his angry disgust he jumped out of bed, but sank back in it giddily.

“Christ!” exclaimed Edmund. “You are not going to get up?”

“Young man,” said the fisherman impressively, “when I heard my boy Teddy use that sacred Name, as some young varmints had got him in the habit of doin’, it seems, I told ’im that I would thrash him within an inch of his life.”

“I am willing to be thrashed at the same respectful distance.”

“You are God’s mark,” quoth the fisherman.

“Did your boy offend again?” asked Edmund.

“I grieve to say he did, sir.”

“And you kept your promise?”

“Well, perhaps I made the inch a hell,

sir ; but I was so awk'ard over it as to bruise his right arm (that skinny it was, sir), and it showed purple. There ! I didn't mean to hurt the lad overmuch."

A dramatic impulse caused Edmund to draw up his sleeve, though he knew what he would see. It was partly a critical curiosity to discover if the fisherman's mind was fine enough to suspect a miracle.

"Well, I never !" cried the latter, "but if you hain't a mark i' the same place ! What a coinsighdence."

"I came into collision with a door," said Edmund briefly. "As for coincidence, it is a very convenient word, and, since it is not in the least blasphemous, I congratulate you."

In passing through the kitchen, he saw his mother with books and papers, and a slate that had belonged to him in the old days.

Moved by curiosity, he sat down and watched her. Well he remembered the hateful grinding noise of the pencil on the slate, which was

still new-looking in spite of surreptitious inkings.

"Poor Eddy," whimpered Mrs Weaverling, "I hain't 'ardly the 'cart to rub it out."

"What is it?" he inquired.

"Bless you, I don't know! 'E was grand at figgurs, was Eddy."

The slate exhibited an attempt to reduce the sixty-seventh of one to a decimal.

"There warn't no end to this sum, Eddy used to say," she replied. "See, sir, he 'ad done both sides of the slate."

"It tails out like a python, eh?"

"Them was his very words," said the woman, the startled reminiscent look returning to her face. "I remember, 'cause I didn't know what a python was."

"Odd," commented Edmund briefly. "Shall I finish the sum for you?" he added.

"No, sir; it is a token."

"Let it be a token, then," he said gravely, watching her hang up the slate.

"When other fellows were thinking of their

sweethearts, he was thinking of the sixty-seventh, and how to make it as long and imposing as he might. Thirty figures perhaps—Lord knows. And when you look at me, my good woman, and see me look so imposing, you must remember the fatal dot before it all. Do you understand?"

"I can't say as I do so, sir; but you *are* fine to-day and no mistake."

"What do you really think of me?" asked Edmund.

She hardened somewhat. "I takes people as I finds 'em."

"Thank you," he said.

Mrs Weaverling spread the table for him, and in good spirits he began his dinner. There was little doubt but that Mrs Gotch was an ineffective adversary, and Sartor a friend in need.

He ate with gusto while Mrs Weaverling began to look through a prize copy-book of Edmund's which she had locked away during the preceding Christmas holidays.

"Ah, he wrote beautiful!" she said.

"Never copied his own fist, eh?"

"No, always the top line, sir." She was in a dreamy heaven with copper-plate maxims written in the sky.

Meanwhile, Edmund ventured to put a hand down to caress Dick who waited grimly upon the meal. The cat scratched him instantly, and withdrew, swearing with no little point.

"A claw in the paw is worth two in the palm," said Edmund with a careful look at his injuries.

While Mrs Weaverling rebuked the cat, Edmund continued pleasantly: "Such I believe is the sense of the last motto but one in that copy-book—the page with the butter mark."

"Why, it's 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,'" said Mrs Weaverling.

"And did I not say 'a claw in the paw is worth two in the palm'?"

"How do you do it?" she demanded,

"Do what?"

“Why, see into things that never have been shown you. The butter mark—how did you see that? Eddy made it at tea when he was showin’ us the book.”

“Ah; vanity begins at home: that, I believe, is the motto of page three. There’s no blot on that page.”

Mrs Weaverling looked at page three, and finding him right except in the word substituted for “charity,” she grew alarmed.

“Can you tell fortunes?” she asked.

“No, I can only make them,” he replied cheerfully, and he walked out.

He smiled over the little trumpery game with his mother as he walked with rapid and stately steps to the promenade. Sartor had given him new life; though now, as heretofore, he was practically penniless, he felt enshrouded and protected by the mystery of untold wealth. He could have passed Old Brewster with superb effrontery; he could have stared through the tremendous solidity of Mrs Gotch as though it were a pane of glass. By

Sartor's help, he could have cold-shouldered his past though it were cast into the speaking likeness of its begetter; by Sartor's help he could have done all these things, and still have preserved a measure of polite condescension for Sartor himself.

Yet it was scarcely Sartor's gala day. Heaven was brooding in secret over the listening land and the dangerous stillness of the sea. Sartor's favourites knew this, and Edmund, finding no gay regiments on the asphalte, walked down the steps into the winds of the undercliff.

There, in the shadow of trees holding strenuously the slanting earth for foothold, as between miniature mountain and miniature abyss he walked, and flippant thoughts and fancies withdrew gradually by the influence of the vast rumination of Nature, and he was able to think in terms of her illimitable thought. He became quiet, sagacious. Sartor had done a noble work: Sartor was forgotten.

As he passed along the path, Edmund discerned a solitary woman reading a book, seated on a rustic bench overlooking the sea.

It was Virginia, whom Edmund saw now for the first time.

She wore a grey dress of a fine thin material without a gloss upon it. In lieu of the semi-masculine starched linen breast-plates of her day, the dress opened triangularly at the bosom to show a soft florally-imprinted vest that spoiled no curve of the woman's most graceful outline. On her studiously-inclined head was a straw hat whose red roses, set in an orange film, looked downwards gaily to the one serious white rose that told where her heart might be. Sprays of her brown hair escaped from her temples, and perhaps it was they that gave the crowning touch of womanliness to the serene face that was no stranger to grief. It was a face that seemed now drooping as a flower wearied of the sun, yet responsive to its lingering farewell. The colour in it was contrasted with

no special paleness as in the case of that called peachbloom : in plain words, the beauties of the face were all honest, not open and joyous as the favourite milkmaid of the idyll would have them, but toned down by quiet endeavour in a sphere of thinking rather than doing, of points of view rather than of simple action—toned down also by failure, not unheroic, and a few tears. Under the delicate oval of the chin was a grey bow, prettily askew. That and the winning flutter of the hair were the only concessions she made to the æsthetic law of disorder. A white glove covered the tender hand which Edmund could see holding the book, and suddenly he longed for its removal. That longing was a sign. He was in love.

He was in love, maybe with a picture, but he was in love. He could feel a lilt in the motion of his being that bid fair to support the whole sullen sky should it dare to fall upon his fate. He could feel it despite all tentacles of the monstrous ugly past cling-

ing to him. And because he felt love naturally, inevitably, absorbingly, instantly, he was playing no spy upon her as he stood, his hand to the rail of the miniature abyss and stole his several glances at her, which he gathered into one perfect view that was to stay with him while life lasted.

Yet even love cannot instil a sense of its own overpowering momentousness in the darkness of semi-obliterated intelligence. It cannot say to the man "irretrievable is the lost heart unless she find it: go thou and say unto her 'Take it for thine, or destroy it in my sight.'" Edmund, therefore, shook himself resolutely and began to pass Virginia. But here the ironies were trampled in the dust in which he strode.

He heard the long-lost music in his ears—"Edmund! Edmund!"

He hesitated, then came towards her.

"Edmund, why did you choose to be called dead? . . . but I knew you were alive . . . I knew it. See, I wear black no longer—I told father I would not."

It is possible that she would have fallen into his arms, but he held out a forbidding hand.

Love the illuminator, in whose clarity of vision there is nothing comparable with the highest good—which, for immortals, is the only aim—withdrew the power to tempt from every falsehood that the occasion might suggest; and if, here and now, Edmund was just in the strict sense of the world's ethic, it was because he might not withstand himself.

"You are deceived," he said in a husky voice; "you are deceived by a resemblance. I am not what you think me."

"Why do you lie to me?" she burst forth passionately.

"I am not lying," he said. "Before God, I repeat that I am not that Edmund whom you addressed."

"Then who are you?" she cried.

"I am the son of a fisherman, and a fisherman myself."

"You say that," she exclaimed, "in that voice—in those clothes? Why are you so dull in your deception? . . . But what does all this mean? Are you tired of me, and would you show it? Is there no kinder way than this?"

"I am bearing the brunt of my sin," said Edmund submissively, while two others strolled between them, oblivious of their tumult. They gave him time to remodel his words. "I am bearing the brunt of my misfortune in being like a greater man, and of my vanity in dressing above my station. But I am not he . . . I cannot be. He was drowned."

"I am bewildered," she said, and the tears sprang into her sea-blue eyes, and there was a sob in her voice.

Profoundly grieved as Edmund was, it was with a sane sadness that neither divided nor confused his mind. It was true that his prototype seemed to be capable of qualifying a man to play the livelong liar on behalf of

a woman whose love was a stormy wind or a consuming fire. But, here and now, he dared not, and could not, propose so fantastic and indecent a compromise with Death as this. The mænad of the undercliff had faded away and left the cleansing presence of this other woman to restore to the leafy aisles their evasive charm, their quiet hospitality of shade. As she looked into his face, it was only the old Edmund that could look back at her. She flooded his brain with a tenderness which drowned the lower life: he could not be harder than the earth under the rain. She had reached and inspired the ultimate speck of good in him. It was the soul of him which flashed out now, and subdued him utterly.

"I am very sorry," he said gently, "very sorry that I cannot help you."

"That will do," she said, and she walked slowly up the incline that led to the promenade.

With head uncovered, Edmund saw her go.

Suddenly he noticed that she flung the book she had been reading into the coppice at her left. Without seeking it, he knew, instinctively, that it contained the verses of her lover, and, by that act of contempt and rage, he was aware that he was paying for a thousand lies by the rarest veracity of a lifetime.

CHAPTER XI

It was impossible to go home. He therefore walked straight down to the fishmarket on his way to the east cliff.

Walking along the edge of the harbour, he was sensible of two boys pointing at him.

“Oo-ni!” cried Gotch-one.

“Bally old thief!” cried Hallaway.

The scene was so like the scene that began this strange masquerade, and yet it was so unlike.

“You’d best be getting home, boys,” said Edmund quietly: “there will be a storm.”

“Teach your grandmother to suck eggs!” cried Hallaway.

Gotch-one put his thumb to his nose, and spread out his fingers.

The stolid fishmongers stared a moment,

but Edmund did not pause in his walk. The pity of human life smote him and drove him on in silence. Never had he missed the pathos of the lonely sun's farewell to the languishing earth breaking into scent and bloom beneath its creative eyes; never had he missed that. But the pathos of ugly things meant to be beautiful, of poisonous things meant to be healing, this till now he had ever missed. Was it because he, too, had been ugly, and that there was a sermon in his body? Who shall tell; but he saw the arid future extending itself before these boys, and he heard the hammers of the forges of the world beating them out into shapes of service. Ah, those hammers of the work-willers, would they, in years of swinging to and fro and up and down, succeed but in the casual framing of some shuffling lie, recognised and paid as such through all its smirch of toil? He, the Great Lie and the beautiful, asked it, and forgave the poet the miracle of his new birth.

He climbed the steep stone stairs, about which the fishermen's cottages stand like eyries, gravely—yet two at a time. Premonition of the storm lay in the lack of creeping, swinging, or reclining urchins. On the summit of all a preliminary chill in the air gave similar warning.

Soon, standing on the water pipes that overflow from Baker's Gap, he saw the sea licking the rocks spitefully. They were flung down in idle profusion before it as though some giant-baby had played at house-building with them for an hour and wilfully refused to put them away. Nervously-tremulous as they shook beneath his tread, or scraped his hands as he slipped upon them, Edmund found at last the place where he decided to face his ordeal. It was a shelf against a large boulder. Here he must sit and think that to-day was the octave of his re-incarnation.

All kinds of clumsy, ugly, discarded things lay in the crannies between the rocks; bare bones, broken bottles, battered pails, dead

dogs—these waited with him before the sea, denying the miracle of his life.

He smiled in their company. To them nothing should happen, though the sea were so greedily, wantonly, slimily full to-night. He guessed how they gurgled as they climbed and licked the legs of the straddling harbour pier.

And the sallow sky above—how ugly that was, how imposingly ugly was the universe! And it all mattered so little, for he was sitting here to reflect how little beauty had done for him.

Why had he wanted to be beautiful then? Because he wanted the mastery of pleasure.

But he had become so beautiful that pleasure had proved inadequate: in other words, he had become too keen a critic of pleasure to enjoy the revels of his lower self.

But he had not tried, his reason urged him to acknowledge, the full powers of this great gift of beauty. The artist was right. Every one capable of responding to it by polar attraction would do so—would come.

The bands of convention would be loosened ; they would be but signs of a vain effort to deter his beauty from conquest.

Gay women, sad women ; ripe women, delicate women ; elfin women, serious women ; soulful women, hearty women—all, in their strength or in their weakness, would come.

They would come if he willed it, as they had come to this sleek and ravening sea when it was shimmering under a shining sun : and the shout of the mariner in the lighthouse—it betrayeth !—would not stay them.

But—there was the rub—his beauty had made him a critic. He must think ere the wine touched his lips—*is it blood ?* And, if it were blood, how could he like it ? He might drink it, he might lie amiably over the last drop, but how could he like it ?

After all, that was what he had chosen his beauty for, that he might like life enormously. But his life was enormous, and he did not like it. And because he did not like it, he

could not act successfully, and people were wrath with what they saw of clotted clay between the seams of the Great Lie.

Was there, then, no compensation for this dislike? He summoned the tempter boldly with closed eyes.

He saw a roomy house with a welcoming porch to it and gardens abutting on a lazy white road. He saw a green lawn in front and his child upon it playing at ball. He saw a pleasant rambling garden at the back, with strawberry beds and currant bushes, and nothing but the fields behind it, with the hills behind them. He saw a copse where the cowslips grew pure with the gold of butter, and rich with the purity of cream, his cowslips, everybody's cowslips, uncounted, inexhaustible. He saw them shine in his hands and he saw her lift them up and share their fragrance, and he saw her eyes, calm, deep, soft, wide—the satisfied mother in them.

And this was all he cared for ; this, with the changes of seasons upon it ; this, with the

hand of Time making it more and more real; O God, this, and not a lie! He could not build all this upon a lie. It would be intolerable to live under the weight and insistence of such a lie.

One for him as Eve was for Adam, one alone who should lull the roaring flames of life into a divine tranquillity, he saw her as he had seen her once and for ever, the woman that he should lie to, lie to, lie to! if he kept her near him.

Words that would come from her heart, womanly voluble — words that he could not, that she would not, invent — would be answered by the polished surface of an adorable lie, and it would be enough. To be deceived is so terrible a calamity that no woman alive might choose to be undeceived. In the fact and the ultimatum he would be alone with his lie.

He opened his eyes upon the first blinding flash of the storm. Well, he had conquered for to-day: but how about to-morrow?

Reason sneered at him from her once-shaken but still elevated throne. The roll of thunder and the immediate fall of rain awed him : his abstinence from tea, moreover, had made him feel a little faint. This combination of fearful reverence and physical discomfort imparted to him a desire to go home. This desire was upset by a singular succession of images. The first was that of himself carrying half the clay of Baker's Gap upon his shoes, in the effort to ascend the cliff ; the second was that of the implacable Mrs Gotch meeting him on his return to the fireside ; the third was that of the evangelist seeking in him the signs of accepted salvation ; the fourth was that of Old Brewster warding him off from the bare Cross to which no one, consciously lying, dare cling.

He buried his face in his hands in sudden remorse. As one who has lost a friend is fain to weep at some one of the startling hollows that open in the bereaved home and chosen haunts, so Edmund felt the in-

most pathetic appeal of those desolate waves that the Christ once trod. Ah! he had pretended to feel the touch of that vanished hand, to receive and appropriate that magnificent gift of salvation; he had played the paltry hypocrite. Had he not indeed done worse, laughed in his sleeve, to wit?

Edmund could not remember: his thoughts became chaotic, but through them all the Passion of Christ, tender and human as he had read it in "The Peep of Day," flashed before him in this stricken wilderness of stone.

Some of that old-time loneliness and terror was recreated on this wonderful night, and the pity he felt was akin to faith; and his hatred of self amounted to self-repudiation.

It was impossible to sit here in such a mood and not think of that other repudiator of self whose self he wore. The subtle egoism that prays, as for mankind, that its selfishness may be indistinguishable in the choice of the prayer, was the possession of the

drowned rhymer. Edmund remembered a chime of vowels that might awake an old sorrow or create a new one, and at the same time lull either to a sad repose. He repeated the verses softly to himself, with an occasional shudder and shiver, as though the soul of his namesake alternately came and went with the sound of the words :

O! Strength and Light of Heaven
Be our stay,
Though sins flow from us seven
And seventy times a day!
Thou, God unseen, Who art all-seeing,
Shine Truth on us alway;
Chase from the chamber of our being,
Falsehood, that bird of prey.
Thou, God, of all good things Creator,
All evil words unsay;
Be of all deeds the Instigator,
Of every light the Ray.
Let us know Thee, the only Donor
Of silver chance or grey,
And our one everlasting Owner,
Though we pay our souls away.
Though we fare as doth the glutton,
And a false god obey,

We implore Thee tread Thy foot on
All worms that foul Thy way.
Sick are we now with sinning,
And with our fate are fey,
Thou, End of our beginning,
For Thy sleep we pray.
Dark whisperers are round about us floating,
Wresting our 'Yea' and 'Nay,'
Pricking in jest our inmost heart, and noting
Each drop of blood we pay.
For full sleep, oceanic, interspersèd
With no dreams that betray,
We thirst, as thirsts for water the accursèd
Desert—once a bay.
Give us Thy sleep, though life laid down were wasted.
Though wake from sleep of death, no self-
steeped sinner may,
For we have loathed the wine-red cup we tasted,
And we cry out for a slayer to slay.
Grant us to know that all our sins are ashes,
As we are, even they;
Reason with that wild hope no longer clashes—
Make it ours, we pray.

“Amen,” said Edmund, speaking from the heart. Nor was his brain unresponsive. Although it was aware of the concealed egoism of the prayer, it was not insensible to the passion that redeems egoism to the

extent of causing, not wonder that such shafts should fall from so lowering a sky, but that such a soul as this poet's should have an empyrean at all. "Amen," said Edmund again; and this time he spoke to bless the spirit of the brink, who (he felt if he dare not suppose it) had moulded him in the one great deformity of his life.

At that instant Edmund saw the heavens open and shut, and paid for daring to look by living for one moment in an utterly black world. "As long as I have the light," mused the philosopher in Edmund, "why not the eternal dark to see it by?"

Under the shuddering dome of lilac light, the rain descended with a strength that left a sound of lashing cords against impious ugliness in the gnome-land far away, while the whipped sea leaped to combat, in a panic of wrath or fear. The thunder ran all round the sky like soldiers following the effulgent breastplate of God; and sometimes it seemed to hurl itself into the rain that fell as from their

bleeding wounds, sucked in by the insatiable earth and sea. But God was everywhere, and, by that man whom He smote, the fear of the thunder might never be felt. His shining breastplate moved on, and none should follow it continually save the thunder; but when it bloomed like a magic flower for one moment and compelled worship from the weary eyes that would fain have sought the craggy floor of rocks, the thunder seemed to start like an ally from the ambush, and the swaying sea swam as in the carnage of a great battle. For the rain fell with a movement of increasing and unceasing speed, and the thunder and the lightning pitched into it as it hissed and foamed, were like the mingling wrath and wealth of a superb gambler's last stake.

Edmund smiled faintly. That celestial conflict, before which land and sea crouched submissively, was glorious, but why was he here? "I am waiting for a change," he thought; but he gave no name to the changer. He only knew that he was tired already of

the veil of illusion which he wore. He was more than tired, he was unhappy. The old individuality, by whose aid he invoked the past to lend a zest to the present, eternally cried out behind the veil. It was the source of his pride and he prized it, but its preservation involved futility and distress; it repelled friendship and embittered love; it was an obstinate spirit, time-worn, and fatal to reasonable bliss.

“But you have not conducted the pageant of your beauty in seemly fashion,” urged Reason. “In the ignorant stare of suspicion you have lost faith in ego; in unsophisticated calf-love you have lost ego itself; you must recreate your heart in the eyes of intelligent worshippers; you must be demi-god.”

“Are you a slave to religion,” cried Reason, between the lashes of the water-thongs. “O fool! Morality is a means towards beauty, and you have an absolute beauty without Morality, and it suffices.”

But the beauty of the shuddering sky

shamed his beauty, which indeed seemed unimportant now, mere symmetry, the beauty of a doll.

And the great dull pageant of fat and wealthy life in Vanity Fair crept slowly and feebly out of the darkness into the mist before his eyes, and fizzled and went out again. What was it worth?—so greasy and easy, so shapeless and purposeless, so impertinent, so vulgar. It was not necessary to be beautiful in order to be vulgar; the long-drawn comfort of a flabby life—was it less hateful for being insidious?

Edmund sat still and shivered. “But what shall I change to?”

There was no revelation for him in the elemental strife, and none in such guesses as he could frame; but to be something through and through, not a glitter over an ash-heap—this was his longing. Into it remorse did not intrude, nor did memory impinge upon it. For the moment he stood aloof on an Archimedean plane, and saw him-

self as a creature asking to fulfil its life, not for honour, or gain, or morality, but to live.

And to live he must change—ay, change. That is why he sat here shivering, arguing by stillness, eloquent by silence. Irresistibly as the distended clouds flung their burden of rain upon land and sea, so he flung outwards his insatiable desire for change. Here, then, he waited, not for ultimate truth, not for judgment, not for pardon, but for change.

He waited for the something withheld through all natural convulsions, the something articulate that makes meaning out of storms.

While attendant on that articulation, Edmund was afraid, and he prayed that he might have strength not to wish for the supine safety of a Great Lie, under the austerities of a great truth.

Then he looked a last time, and saw a fountain of the dancing lightning and it was gone; and there was a great thirst felt from the depths of the salted sea, and the drenched wind whimpered, and the thunder muttered.

His eyes prayed for mercy ; he was afraid of the dark.

Then fell a silver dagger from a dazzling geyser of light : but that silver dagger was never seen by him, and the thunder's proclamation of it was a vain noise.

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In the morning Mrs Weaverling went down to the beach. Thereon she found two bodies. One was the body of her crippled son ; it was hard to see shape or meaning in it. The other was the body of one charred and scarred by lightning, but recognisably beautiful. Virginia, having heard of it, resumed the wearing of black.

THE END.

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